



SAR Consultancy and Media Pulse
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Exploring media accounts of the shooting of two military personnel in Sarajevo 18 November 2015 to better understand Enes Omeragic and his likely links to extremism.

In the light of the recent terrorist attacks in Paris, security forces across Europe have gone on high alert given the shared reality that all countries are becoming increasingly vulnerable. Bosnia Herzegovina were one of the first to feel the effects of this increasing risk, when two members of the BiH armed forces were shot and killed, whilst in uniform, on Wednesday 19 November 2015. Reports state that a male, now named as Enes Omeragic, walked into a betting shop in Rajlovac, near Sarajevo and shot and killed the two men in uniform, leaving four other people present unharmed. On leaving the shop, Omeragic reportedly shot at a third member of the armed forces, wounding him and two members of the public. Media reports claimed that Omeragic used an automatic rifle in the course of the attack. Omeragic reportedly left the scene and returned home, to Sokolje, where he is reported to have committed suicide by blowing himself up with a grenade. After initial investigations of the scene and the nature of the incident, the Prosecutor's Office issued a statement setting out that the incident in Rajlovac constituted an act of terrorism and as a result, the case was transferred to SIPA, the competent authority.

Who is Enes Omeragic?

Since the attack there has been many comments in the media about the type of person Enes Omeragic was. Omeragic was born in France 1 August 1981. Some neighbours have said the 34 year old was a member of the Salafi movement, but others have challenged that assessment. It seems to be more widely accepted that he was a drug addict with previous convictions, and had spent time in prison for aggravated thefts. Many reports claimed that Omeragic had grown a beard and was wearing trousers ending above the ankle at the time of the incident, having more recently taken on this guise. However, neighbours of Omeragic reportedly challenged this opinion and said he did not dress like a member of the Wahhabi movement. Nonetheless, one neighbour did say that he spoke about activities of the movement more recently. Omeragic's father was reported in the media as denying Enes was a part of the Salafi community. That said, materials supporting IS were found in Omeragic's house. His relationship with his brother in law, Muhamed Meco was also presented. It was said that this was his only link to other radical Islamists. Media reports claimed that Meco's house was raided and searched after the incident in Rajlovac with a view of investigating if he had influenced Omeragic. Media reports claimed that Minister Mektic was reported in the media as saying that the information found to date would indicate that Omeragic had been radicalized. The Minister was also reported to have said that it would appear that Omeragic was radicalized over the last two years.

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What is being alleged in the media?

Although the majority of media reports claim that while Omeragic was known to the police, a proportion of media reports claim he was not known as a member of any of the radical groups. That said, commitments were made by the security forces to investigate if Omeragic was a member of the Wahhabi community, if he had been to Syria or if he associated with some who had travelled. Conversely, some sources were reported in the media as saying that Omeragic was a known member of a radical group and that he had been on a list of BiH Intelligence-Security Agency (OSA) for five years. SIPA has yet to confirm or deny that Omeragic was known to the police or intelligence agencies of BiH. That said, some media agents reported that an unnamed source close to the investigation said that Omeragic had travelled to Syria in 2014 and fought with IS and also reiterated that he had been on the OSA list of persons who may pose a threat to the national security back in 2010. The same source is reported to have said that Omeragic attended lectures by Bajro Ikanovic. Details of Omeragic's alleged travel to Syria could not be found in the open source information available to the analyst. This should not be viewed as confirmation that he did not travel, given that many extremists travel under the radar.

Interestingly, some media reports from Serbia claimed that Omeragic was on a Serbian registry, as he was a perceived risk to Serbia because of his alleged connections with radical members of the Wahhabi movement in the region of Raska. It was alleged that Omeragic was a close follower of Mirza Ganic who had been killed in Syria in early 2014. However, others have suggested that he was only known in Serbia because he had previously been arrested on suspicion of involvement in narcotics and weapons smuggling. Interestingly, a Serbian security source was reported in the media as saying that Omeragic was not on the list of Wahhabis from BiH and therefore was let travel into Serbia in August without surveillance. If this was the case, it was unlikely Omeragic was on the Serbian list given he was allowed to travel in country without surveillance.

This account illustrates that many conflicting allegations have been made against Omeragic, which makes it difficult to determine which aspects are more credible than others. As a result, the analysis moved to examine Omeragic's alleged network.

Possible links to suspected Extremists examined

The media reports analysed alleged links between Omeragic and three suspected extremists, two of which are significant in the network of suspected

Methodology

SAR Consultancy was provided with access to Media Pulse's extensive media collection repository to conduct a qualitative media content analysis. The period of articles under review was the media articles since the attack in Rajlovac 18 Nov. 2015. All articles that referenced Enes Omeragic were included in the review. The findings were then enhanced by further investigation into media articles and research reported to try to substantiate earlier findings. This analysis, albeit thorough, is based only on media reported articles. Therefore, while presenting valuable insights into perspectives on radicalisation in BiH and those potentially linked to it, the reports should not be used as categorical evidence of involvement in such activities.

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extremists in BiH. The first to be examined will be Omeragic's brother in law, Muhammed Meco. The second two, are likely to be the most significant if the links are shown to be credible, given these two individuals have links to BiH, Serbia and Syria, both having reportedly spent time in Syria, with one reportedly losing his life there. It has not been possible to confirm this at this time.

- **Muhammed Meco**

Meco was reported in the media as having links to Rijad Rustempasic and was reportedly arrested in 2008 on suspicion of planning a terrorist attack in BiH, with Rustempasic, Edis Velic and Abdulah Handzic. It is reported that Meco was later released due to insufficient evidence, while the others were convicted. Since then, it has been alleged that Meco made attempts to go to Syria but was turned back at the Turkish border. However, other reports suggest that he did spend time in Syria in 2013.

- **Bajro Ikanovic**

Ikanovic (37) reportedly led a Balkans based group of fighters in Syria, whose travel was allegedly facilitated by Nusret Imamovic, another well-known suspected extremist in BiH. Ikanovic was reportedly arrested in 2007 on suspicion of plotting European bombings in 2005, alongside Mirsad Bektasevic and Adbulkadir Cesur. Ikanovic was imprisoned for 8 years but released after 4 years. It has been suggested that Ikanovic set up a Wahhabi community in Hadzici, Sarajevo, which allegedly became one of the locations where many individuals stayed prior to travelling to Syria. More interestingly in respect to this piece, it is alleged that Ikanovic had direct links with the third individual linked to Omeragic. Mirza Ganic.

- **Mirza Ganic**

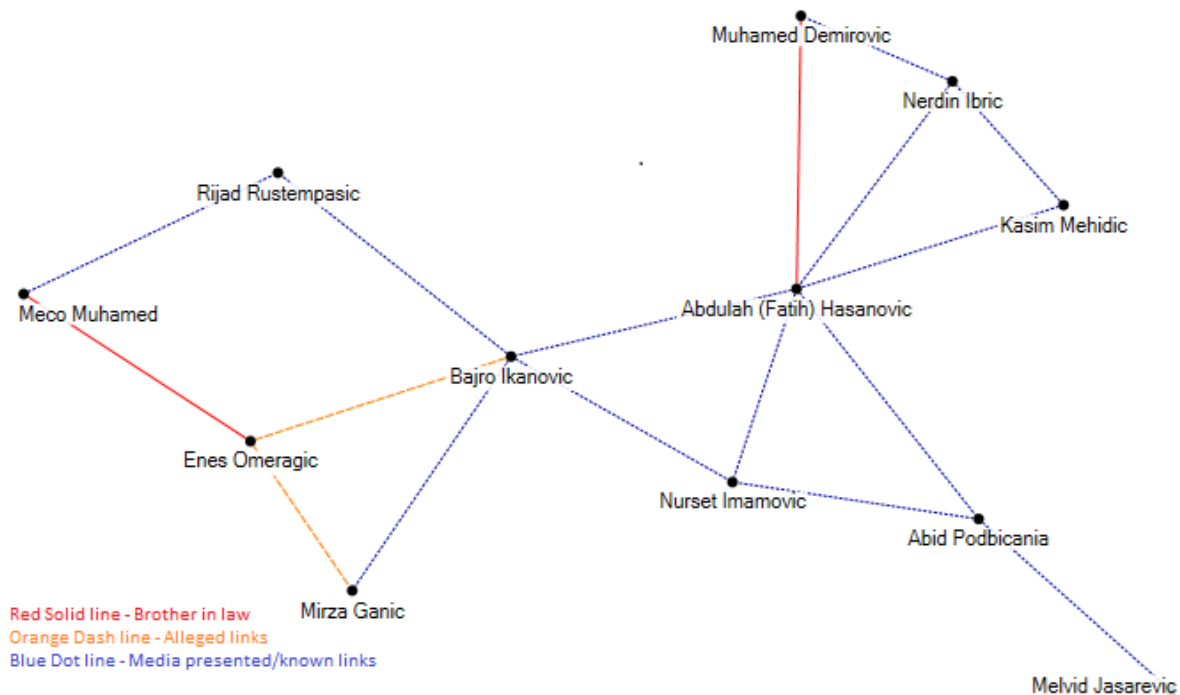
Ganic (19) was from Novi Pazar reportedly travelled to Syria in May 2013 and killed there in January 2014. Some media reports from October 2013 claim that Ganic was Ikanovic's deputy in Syria.

While it is difficult to find explicit evidence of these links between Omeragic and Ikanovic and Ganic. These acquaintances are not beyond credibility.

Potential extended links if alleged links to Meco, Ikanovic, and Ganic are correct*

Whether Omeragic was or was not on the list will remain to be seen as the investigation continues, but in the meantime, this piece examines potential links, be they direct or indirect between Omeragic and other known or suspected extremists. Interestingly, when one just uses the three names as examined above a number of potential links become evident. As identified earlier, the possible links between Omeragic and Muhamed Meco, Bajro Ikanovic, and Mirza Ganic have been identified. When these people are mapped in a network analysis, a number of interesting links become evident. There appears to be a direct link between Ikanovic and Ganic. Whilst there appears to be an indirect link between Meco and Ikanovic, via a direct link between Ikanovic and Rustempasic.

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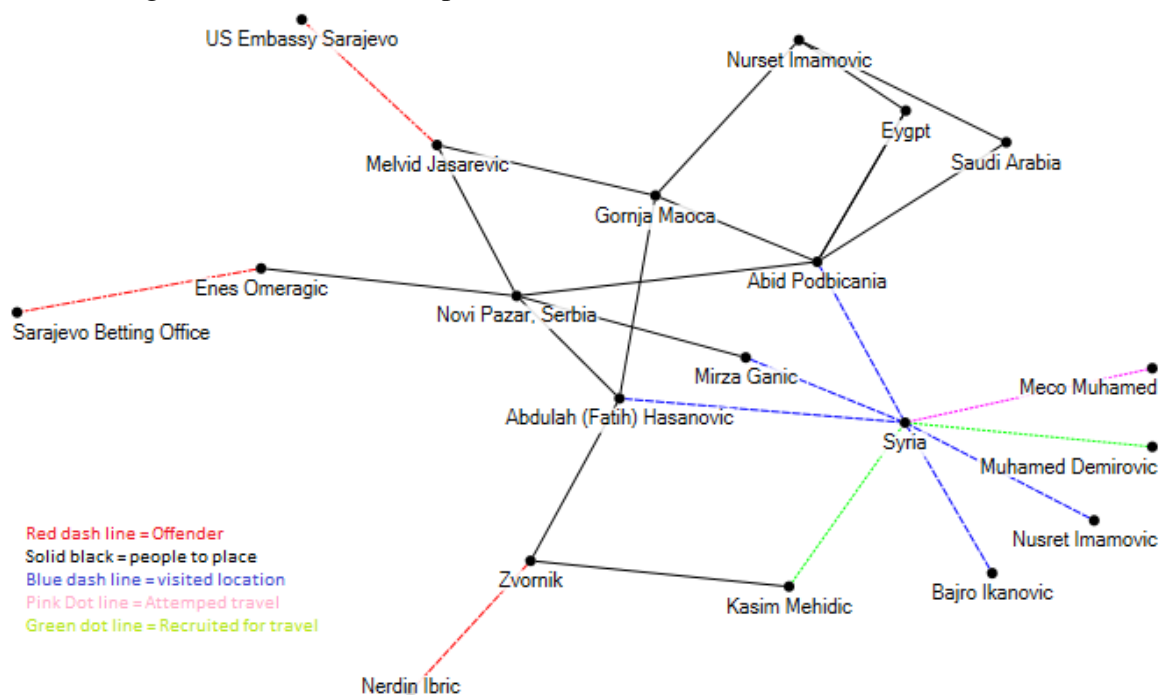
(i) Network Analysis of Enes Omeragic's potential reach

These links may be an indication of how Omeragic may have entered into this network. If they are correct, these links could represent one of the best known clusters of extremists in the Balkans, Gornja Maoca. Gornja Maoca is a known enclave for extremists, reportedly lead by Nusret Imamovic, a close acquaintance of Bajro Ikanovic. It has been claimed that the community in Gornja Maoca live according to Shari'a law. However, others have suggested it is a training location for those intending to travel to Syria to fight with IS. Interestingly, this cluster is alleged to have close links to Novi Pazar in Serbia. For example, Mevludin Jasarevic who was convicted for his involvement in an attack on the US Embassy in Sarajevo in October 2011, resided in the community, but was from Novi Pazar. Novi Pazar is also the home of Mirza Ganic. Novi Pazar in itself has been labelled as a Serbian recruitment enclave, with five suspected recruiters arrested in Oct 2014 in Novi Pazar and Belgrade. One of those arrested was Abid Podbicanin. He was the leader of the Furkan Centre, a place frequented by Jasarevic. It is reported that Podbicanin travelled to Syria in late 2014 to avoid arrest, where he reportedly died in early 2015. It is difficult to find evidences of direct links between Podbicanin and Ganic, however, reports do suggest that Ganic was a member of Furkan and it is reported that he attended a mosque in Novi Pazar which held extremist views. No specific connection to Podbicanin could be found. Interestingly, both Podbicanin and Imamovic can be directly linked, in that they were reported to have travelled to Egypt together to seek funding. Furthermore, it is reported that Podbicanin also lived in Gornja Maoca a few year ago, before coming back to Serbia. Both men also were said to have studied in Saudi Arabia.

While it is difficult to formally link Omeragic to such groups, the impact of such links should not be underestimated. An example of the potential impact of such networks with an apparent unknown offender can be seen from the attack in Zvornik this year. Nerdin Ibric, a relatively

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unknown individual, walked into a police station and killed a police man and wounded another. Avdulah Hasanovic, a well-known extremist was arrested for his suspected involvement in this incident. Extensive linked between Ibric and Hasanovic were evident prior to the incident, often visiting Dubnica together, it is reported. Interestingly, Hasanovic can be linked to Ikanovic, Podbicanin, Syria and Novi Pazar. He is said to have attended Podbicanin’s mosque in Novi Pazar and to have fought with the same group as Ikanovic in Syria but it is unclear if they were there at the same time. While this does not illustrate links to Omeragic. It does illustrate how known suspects with a wide network of other suspected extremists can be linked to potential offenders or unknown suspects. This demonstrates the extent to which security forces need to be monitoring the links between suspects and others.

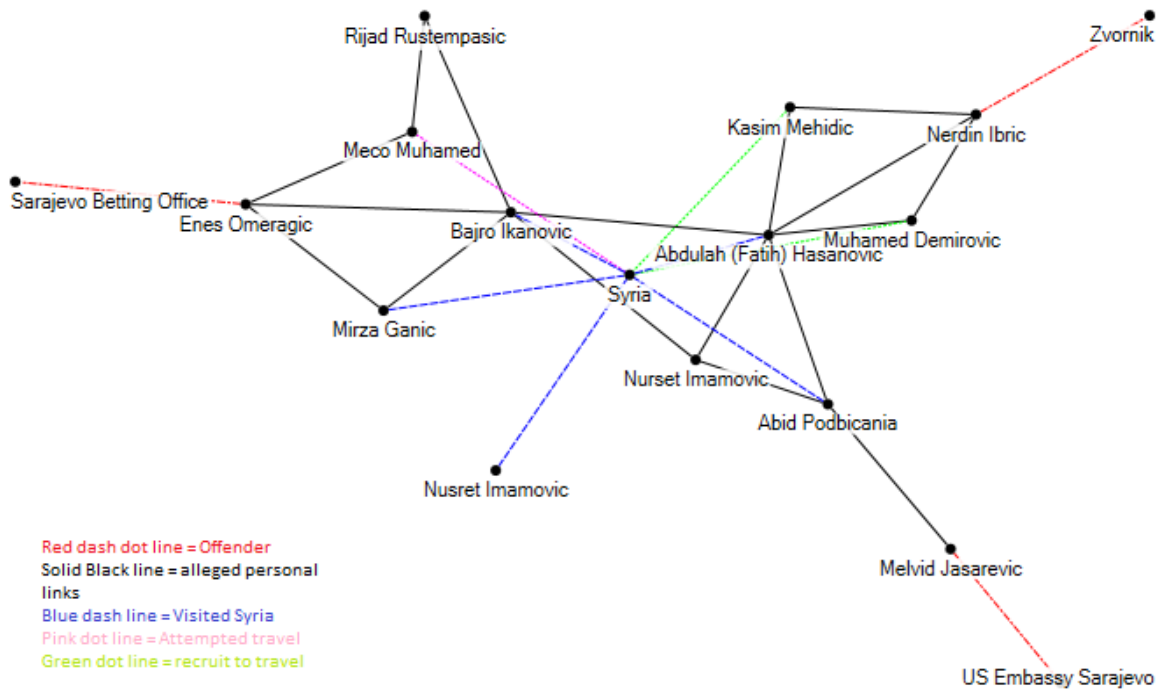


(ii) Network Analysis of Potential Geographical links

Some interesting possibilities

A media source is reported to have said that Omeragic attended lectures by Bajro Ikanovic. If this was the case, it is likely that Omeragic was on the radar of the security forces, irrespective of whether he was on the actual list of suspected threats to national security. Attendance at such events should have highlighted a potential risk especially in light of other incidents. For example, from looking at similar incidents of this nature, such as those in Bugojno and Zvornik which on investigation showed that the offenders, Haris Causevic and Nerdin Ibric were in contact with other known extremists prior to the event. Given this previous pattern, even if little was known about Omeragic, it should have highlighted the risk of relatively unknown individuals conducting attacks against the state.

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(iii) Network Analysis of links from previous incidents

From this analysis, cognisant that it is largely speculative, it is likely that Omeragic's links to extremists went beyond Meco; whether Ikanovic or Ganic were extremely influencing still remains unclear but given their direct links and their direct/indirect links to other individuals suspected of extremism, it is convincible that claims that Omeragic had links beyond Meco. That said, it is also conceivable that Omeragic was inspired by recent events in Paris and subsequent threats made on Vijesti Ummeta which may have influenced his actions. The potential role of the internet should not be ruled out, especially given media reports claiming links between Mirza Ganic and Omeragic. Given that Ganic was known for his public online image, Omeragic may have followed him online. Furthermore, if this link is correct, it could provide an insight into Omeragic's radicalisation process. Given that Ganic reportedly died in January 2014, if the links were credible, this may suggest that media claims that Omeragic was radicalised at least over the last two years are somewhat credible.

If claims that Omeragic had links with known suspected extremists that went beyond Meco were known to the security forces, greater surveillance was likely to have been warranted. Such an incident, in any country, is likely to highlight strengths and weaknesses in how security forces respond. Unfortunately, albeit the event was relatively contained quickly, the incident illustrates, once again, some of the ongoing weaknesses in the security services of BiH. Positively, some of the forces themselves highlighted specific issues, such as the lack of cooperation and coordination across many agencies, the lack of data exchange, and the lack of suspect monitoring, whilst also highlighting the need to improve these issues in light of this growing threat.

If the links, as presented in the media analysis, are not shown to be true and if Omeragic had not previously come to the attention of the police or security forces to date, an incident such as

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this illustrates the difficulties in preventing such an attack. That said, if any of the links are proven to be correct, and if Omeragic was known to the security forces, this incident may illustrate that the security forces do not have the capacity or resources to monitor such individuals, which at first glance look like less of a risk than known extremists.

Interestingly, one article claimed that Omeragic trained in a camp in France established by Lionel Dumont, an alleged French extremist. Dumont's links to BiH date back to the war, when it is alleged he fought alongside the mujahideen. Once again, if this link is correct and known, this should have been a red flag for security forces. No further reference to this could be found for the purpose of this piece.

On another note, the incident in Rajlovac illustrated the availability of weapons, which admittedly is not a new phenomenon in BiH society. However, the fact that Omeragic blew himself up before he could be arrested is a new dimension for terrorist incidents in BiH, a practice increasingly common with those linked to IS. This may also suggest that Omeragic was inspired by IS.

Conclusion

All that said, if little was known about Omeragic other than his drug taking and criminal behaviour and he hung around with his brother-in-law on occasion, may not have been enough for security forces to put him on a watch list, given the resource implications if they did that for everyone who met the same criteria. That said, if he was attending lectures with Ikanovic, the security forces should have followed up on finding out who he was, and if his dress has changed and if he was talking more extremist rhetoric, the security forces should have been more proactive in their monitoring, from what is now known from Zvornik and Bugnojo. If he was travelling to Novi Pazar and frequented known extremist mosques or meeting suspected extremists, he should have come to the attention of the Serbian authorities, who also could have reported their suspicions to BiH force. It should be noted that this may have happened and therefore the comments contained which reference the security forces either in BiH or Serbia do not imply judgement on what they did or did not do.

However, if he was not attending these lectures or if he was not travelling to Novi Pazar and such places, it may have been more difficult for security forces to register him as a risk. Given his alleged relationship with Ganic, and knowing that Ganic was quite open on social media about his thoughts and opinions, not afraid to issue threats against politicians in both Serbia and BiH, it would be worth examining whether Omeragic had an active online presence by which he was radicalised. Admitting this may have been more difficult to monitor depending on the current capacity of the BiH authorities in this area.

Note: *While this piece does not allege to present any definitive findings relating to Omeragic. It just provides food for thought about his possible links to known extremists in BiH and beyond, which may have influenced his behaviour.*

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