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INTRODUCTION

The main policy purpose of the Balkan Defence Monitor remains the same as in the last year. In recent years, the local elites have misused the lack of transparency related to defence policies in the Western Balkans, turning the military into a tool of domestic political promotion rather than a public good. This model of behaviour did not cause an armed conflict, and it is unlikely that it will do so in the future. However, it has poisoned the already fractious political ties between the countries of the region and fostered an atmosphere of distrust. To counter these negative occurrences, data on the defence sector needs to be made accessible to the citizens of Western Balkan countries and the international community. The ongoing war in Ukraine and the destabilisation of the European security environment make such an approach even more relevant.

The Balkan Defence Monitor is a research project that was launched by the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP) to collect data and analyse key information about defence policies in the six countries of the Western Balkans region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia). The initial Balkan Defence Monitor of 2022 was a pilot research project (it was completed in 2022), and this report represents its continuation. Just like the previous one, it provides an overview of the annual defence expenditures, key strategic documents, international military cooperation (military exercises, military donations and participation in peace missions) and representation of women in the defence sectors of the six selected countries. The new report however includes transparency in the defence sector as another area of analysis.

The current report does not deviate from the methodology that was established in the previous one. Data was collected for the period December 2021-December 2022. This was done by analysing publicly available government documents and other open sources, and by submitting requests for access to information of public importance. An official inquiry was sent to the respective countries’ Ministries of Defence (MoDs). This step is an integral part of the research in terms of its scope, raising the issue of how promptly the MoDs respond to such inquiries and the fact that responses differ in terms of the level of detail and quality. The data content provided by the MoDs differs in terms of precision and systematic disaggregation. The inquiry was also sent to the Press Office of the US Embassy to Bosnia and Herzegovina, which also responded.

The research finding on military budgets shows that the region has experienced a slow increase over the last five years. However, only Serbia has surpassed the 2% GDP spending threshold. In contrast, Bosnia and Herzegovina has the lowest military expenditure in the region, maintaining it below 1% of the GDP. Defence expenditures are published as part of government budgets and balance sheets of total government expenditures. However, different countries use different methods to present their defence expenditures; some publish only aggregated sums of larger categories, which makes it difficult to isolate and analyse individual costs.

As regards the budget structure, the situation varies. While Serbia spends money on arms and equipment, the majority of the defence budget in Bosnia and Herzegovina is spent on personnel. With the exception of Albania’s, defence expenditures of the region’s NATO members reported to the Alliance differ from the government balance sheets. This is caused by the fact that NATO expenditure methodology includes military pensions, which are not included in national budget funds intended for MODs.

As regards research findings on international military cooperation, it was established that when it comes to military exercises, NATO and NATO member states are the dominant partners of most Western Balkan countries in conducting military exercises, due to the fact that four countries in the region - Albania, Croatia, Montenegro and North Macedonia - are members of the Alliance. Although there is no consensus on this membership in Bosnia and Herzegovina, NATO and its member states are the main partners of Sarajevo when it comes to military drills. Serbia is the only country from the region that did not conduct any military exercises with its international partners, as Belgrade has abandoned all the activities related to international military drills because of the war in Ukraine.
Belgrade's decision shows that Serbia is continuing with its geopolitical balancing, manifested, among other things, through its proclaimed military neutrality.

As for military donations, the US asserts itself as the main military donor to Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Turkey is acting as an increasingly important defence partner of Albania, while in 2022 the UK played this role in North Macedonia. Serbia received only two donations in 2022 - one from the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the other from the US embassy in Belgrade.

Regarding participation in peace missions, the Western Balkan countries continued to participate in the same set of missions as before. Nevertheless, the notable change is that NATO members from the region have deployed their troops to participate in NATO's forward-deployed forces aimed at strengthening NATO's eastern flank and deterring Russia. This is the case with NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Latvia, where Albania, North Macedonia and Montenegro dispatched their troops; enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group Poland (eFPBG-POL), where Croatia sent its troops; and NATO enhanced Vigilance Activities (eVA) in Bulgaria and Romania, where North Macedonia dispatched one platoon to each country. In NATO enhanced Vigilance Activities (eVA) in Bulgaria, Montenegrin troops are also among those of the contributing nations. Bosnia and Herzegovina could not rotate its troops in peace missions because of the long blockade of state institutions, but upon the formation of the country's Presidency a decision was made to continue the support of all the missions in which the country used to participate. Serbia continues its policy of military neutrality, sending its troops to participate in the UN and EU missions, but not in those of NATO.

Regarding key strategic documents related to security and defence, the Western Balkan countries have not adopted new doctrinal documents despite the monumental transformation of the European security landscape that was caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Adopting new strategies has been a slow and difficult process, both bureaucratically and politically. In this context, Bosnia and Herzegovina's last valid strategic documents are still the National Security Strategy of 2006 and the National Defence Strategy of 2008.

The extant documents mostly focus on familiar themes, citing military invasions as potential but not likely security threats, as opposed to more prominent threats of economic instability, nationalism, separatism, terrorism and organised crime. Except for Serbia, which declared military neutrality, countries of the region remain focused on their NATO membership or the acquisition thereof as essential to their national security. Membership in the EU remains a proclaimed goal of all Western Balkan countries.

The war in Ukraine and new global strategic trends will probably force many Western Balkan countries to re-examine their national security strategies. This will particularly apply to countries that are members of NATO, as the Alliance has adopted a new strategic concept, with Russia dominating its strategic agenda. As opposed to this, Russia and China are rarely mentioned as potential threats in most of the extant strategic documents in the Western Balkans.

For some of these countries, adopting new strategies will not be easy. Montenegro, for example, faces a constitutional crisis and uncertainty as to who will form the new Government. At the same time, uncertainty also looms in North Macedonia regarding the potential return of nationalist parties. Given its political dysfunction and divisions in the country, Bosnia and Herzegovina will also have difficulty readjusting its strategic documents. The same goes for Serbia, which continues to struggle with its balancing act between Russia and the West, the Kosovo dispute and the passionate opinion of its citizens.

As regards representation of women in the defence systems of the Western Balkan countries, the UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security remains the bedrock of the strategy to ensure greater representation of women. However, its implementation is uneven, as only Croatia and North Macedonia have valid action plans on women, peace and security, while the strategic documents of other countries have expired despite the evident need to renew them in the context of the Ukraine war. Albania and Croatia are the only countries that almost meet the NATO standard of 15% female members of the uniformed armed forces. Albania, North
Macedonia, Montenegro and Croatia have the highest percentage of female officers, while Serbia is the country with the highest participation of women among enlisted personnel. In Croatia and Serbia, women comprise half of the civil servants in national defence systems.

Regarding command and leadership positions, Croatia excels in comparison with the rest of the region. Serbia remains the only country in the Western Balkans that has not yet appointed a woman as defence minister. Serbia is the leading country in women's participation in peacekeeping missions, while in the rest of the region such participation is low. Bosnia and Herzegovina currently has no members of the armed forces engaged in peacekeeping missions and, consequently, no women either.

When it comes to transparency, there are significant variations among the Balkan countries. Croatia remains the most transparent in all areas, but its latest purchase of air defence systems, which were not planned in the budget, raised certain concerns about its transparency in defence sector procurement. On the other hand, Albania is still the least transparent when it comes to disclosing information in almost all aspects of defence, with its defence budget containing only seven general categories. Moreover, the website of the Albanian MoD still does not work. Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia are moderately transparent with their financial information. Although Serbian MoD is quite responsive to freedom of information (FOI) requests, some categories of data have not been available to the public since the adoption of the 2016-2018 legislative amendments. This places Serbia at the end of the transparency list concerning human resources, as this data is mostly classified as secret.

Most strategic documents and reports are publicly available, with certain exceptions. Bosnia and Herzegovina is the only country whose Military doctrine is published online. Regarding gender, Montenegro and North Macedonia publish annual reports on implementing UNSCR 1325 national action plans. Croatian reports cover a period of two years, while Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia have published reports on the entire period of their last NAPs. While these reports are generally detailed, there is room for improvement regarding transparency. In 2022, Serbia formed a new organisational unit for gender equality within its MoD, which indicates increased commitment to gender equality in the defence sector.
Croatia remains the most transparent in all areas, followed by Montenegro, while Albania can be described as the least transparent, due to the least disaggregated budget and the MOD website not working. North Macedonia has been improving in transparency as the website of MOD is well organized and contains most of relevant information. On the other hand, Serbia has recorded backsliding in transparency since legislative amendments from 2016 to 2018, which enabled the MOD to arbitrarily classify entire categories of data as secret and restrict access to information on human resources management (for instance, number of newly appointed staff, data on personnel attrition etc.) and a number of strategic documents and reports.

Generally speaking, access to information related to the defence sector in the Balkans varies to a considerable extent, depending on the country and thematic area. All countries have mechanisms for access to public information in place, but their effectiveness is rather questionable, and the responses from the some of the Ministries received by BCSP vary in quality compared to the ones received for the previous edition of Balkan Defence Monitor. Considering proactive publication of information on the websites of institutions, all Ministries occasionally share news on relevant donations, military drills or specific projects, but access to data related to human resources is not always easily accessible and not all information is up to date.

When it comes to financial information, budgets of the ministries of defence, as parts of annual national budgets, can be found on the governments’ websites of all six countries. However, these budgets differ to a large extent, with Croatian being the most and Albanian the least transparent, judging by criteria such as the level of disaggregation and references to specific procurement projects. While information about donations cannot always be easily accessed, all ministries are somewhat responsive to requests for access to public information related to foreign donations and most of them publish news articles related to donations on their websites.

Strategic documents are generally accessible, with certain exceptions which are classified as secret as in the case of Serbia, or when they cannot be obtained via research, like with some documents from Albania and Montenegro. Only Bosnia and Herzegovina has its Military Doctrine published on the website. All countries except Serbia provide data on the total number of personnel disaggregated into ranks upon the FOI request or on their website in the case of Croatia, but Croatia and Montenegro are the most transparent in the area of human resources, as their annual defence reports provide data on military education or staff turnover, for example. Gender transparency is a weak spot for all countries, with only Croatia proactively publishing the percentage of women across military ranks on the Armed Forces website. All countries, however, delivered this data upon FOI request. Reporting on National Actions Plans for implementation of UNSCR 1325 is not systematic and it is hard to compare the data, even if the reports themselves could be described as quite detailed and transparent in most of the cases.
Albania

Albanian defence budget consists of only seven general categories: Planning, Management and Administration, Combat Forces, Military Education, Combat Support, Health Support, Social Support and Civil Emergencies. Even though capital expenditure is disaggregated between internal and external financing, the lack of cost breakdown in the administrative sections makes the budget of the Ministry of Defence of Albania the least transparent in the region. Ministry of Finance publishes annual reports on the implementation of the budget of the Ministry of Defence, but these reports contain aggregate data on budgeted and executed expenses and do not contribute to more transparency on how the money was spent.

With the website of Ministry of Defence still being inaccessible, information about donations retrieved via FOI request stated the donor and the value of the donation, but the subject of donations was referred to as “material” and cannot be linked to specific equipment.

Just like in 2021, Albania is not transparent enough regarding access to information and its visibility. In response to the request for access to information, Albanian MOD did not provide a list of donations like it did in 2021, but its response included the overall value of donations from Turkey and the US. The lack of data was also present in the open-source research.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Budget of the Ministry of Defence of Bosnia and Herzegovina is more detailed in the section of current than capital expenditure. The former does account for most of the country’s defence budget, as the majority of it goes to salaries. The subsection of contracted services is not elaborated. The BiH defence budget does mention a specific project called “Perspektiva” which is aimed at transition assistance to the laid off staff. However, the budget item related to equipment purchase is stated as a lump sum, the items related to maintenance are not detailed either and donations are not stated in the Ministry of Defence budget section. On the other hand, annual reports on the execution of the budget of the Ministry of Defence (the last one available on the website being for 2021) are far more detailed and provide information about specific projects and procurement.

When it comes to donations, information can be obtained via FOI request. However, the response is significantly less detailed than the one obtained for the previous issue of Balkan Defence Monitor, which stated the donor country, value of the donation and other details, pointing out inconsistency in implementing the right to access to public information. The MOD’s response to the FOI request from February 2023 speaks only about the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina received donations from NATO, the EU and bilateral partners without specifying the value of these donations and their exact content. Therefore, data on military donations to Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2022 was collected through open-source analysis. News about some of the donations are also published on the website of the Ministry of Defence.

Croatia

Out of all countries covered by the analysis, the budget of Croatia is the only one referencing specific procurement projects in the section dedicated to the Ministry of Defence. It includes the total sum of donations, and the expenditure is the most detailed, with subsections outlining the costs of UN, NATO and EU military missions respectively. Revenue from the EU Solidarity Fund is shown as an item in the subsections where it is applicable. Despite having the most transparent budget, in 2022 MOD raised concern on this issue with signing of a contract for purchase of the air defence system Mistral, which was not planned in the budget.²

While donations to the defence sector are included in the budget as a lump sum, MOD publishes news about donations on its website. These articles do not always include the value of donations, but the Annual Defence Report includes a textual explanation of the contents and value of the donations. However, the Annual Defence Report for 2021 was only adopted by the Government in October 2022 and the report for 2022 is still not published. Data on the largest military donations to Croatia was compiled through open-source research.

Montenegro

Budget of Montenegro can be described as somewhat more transparent than the most in the sample, with certain reservations. Article 6 of the Law on the budget of Montenegro for 2022 states that revenue of the Ministry of Defence will be used for "financing the realization of partner goals" and modernization in line with NATO standards, while Article 11 announces a planned procurement of two patrol ships with the loan provider to be determined. Budget of the Ministry of Defence contains several subsections and is disaggregated to a large extent. However, the expenditure on equipment is shown as a single budget item in several subsections, without references to specific procurement projects, unlike in the case of Croatia. While most of the subsections contain a detailed list of services, considerable amounts are classified under the item of "other services." This is also the case with several items referring to "transfers to individuals" without elaboration. Specific projects related to construction and maintenance of defence infrastructure can be found in the budget section of Public Works Administration.

Montenegro could be described as the most transparent when it comes to donations, together with Croatia, as its annual defence reports³ thoroughly describe donations in the defence sector, including their donor, value, subject of the donation and state of realization. Government of Montenegro also offers information about donations in the defence sector through the news published on its website. Lastly, details about donations can be obtained via FOI request.

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North Macedonia

Despite defence budget of North Macedonia being well disaggregated, information about equipment expenditure is not quite transparent, as the item “purchase of equipment and machinery” is listed twice, both as a lump sum, without references to specific purchases. Infrastructure expenditure cannot be linked to specific projects either. On the other hand, expenditure is clearly divided by source: self-financing, loans and donations. The subsection on decentralization, which accounts for current transfers to local government units, is rather unelaborated. While NATO integration subsection contains only the item on equipment and machinery purchase, a textual description of the aims of this activity is provided, however without specifications in terms of specific projects and equipment.

Only basic information about donations – such as value and donor - can be obtained via request for public information. While news about donations can be found on MOD’s website, none are available from 2022.

Serbia

Despite a certain degree of data disaggregation, Serbian defence budget contains various subcategories with generic titles “machines and equipment” without mention of specific procurement projects. The budget for 2022 includes an overview of planned capital expenditures in the defence sector until 2024 and one of the largest items is equipping with weapons and military equipment according to the tripartite agreement, signed between the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Defence and Public Enterprise “Jugoimport-SDPR”⁴ (arms trade company). However, the budget does not contain an explanation of what equipment is to be bought through the agreement. Another issue pointed out in the Government Defence Integrity index is the fact that the differences between budgeted and executed costs are usually not accounted for.⁵ MOD is responsive to FOI requests and it provided details about one realized donation during 2022.

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All six countries have defence strategies and national security strategies published on the websites of the ministries of defence, although the website of Albanian MOD cannot be accessed. In the case of Montenegro, all relevant documents are published on the website of the Government and can be obtained through the search engine. Montenegro is the only country which does not have a separate MOD website, while MOD websites of all other countries contain sections listing all or most of the strategies, documents and reports, which contributes to their accessibility and transparency.

Only Bosnia and Herzegovina has its Military Doctrine publicly available and it is published on the website of the Ministry of Defence. Defence Strategy of Montenegro and Action Plan foresaw the adoption of Military Doctrine for the 4th quartal of 2020, but no follow up on the initiative could have been tracked in research. When it comes to Serbia, Military Doctrine was adopted in 2010 and used to be publicly available as there are academic works referencing it, the last one being from May 2016. That is not the case anymore, as the document has been declared “internal” according to the Data secrecy law, it was explained in the response by the Ministry of Defence. The same goes for several other documents, such as the action plans for implementation of the Defence Strategy and National Security Strategy, as well as the outdated long-term development plan for the period from 2011 to 2020, which was classified as “top secret.”

While Serbia still did not adopt a new long-term development plan, as confirmed by the Ministry of Defence in the response to the FOI request, Albania, Croatia, Montenegro and North Macedonia have all made their long-term development plans available to the public. The 2022 work program of the Ministry of Defence of Bosnia and Herzegovina mentions the Long-term modernization plan of the Armed Forces of BiH 2017-2027, but this document cannot be found in the extensive list of documents published on the Ministry’s website. Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatia and Serbia also publish mid-term development plans covering 2-year periods, but the research did not reveal such plans in the case of Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia.

Serbia is the least transparent in this segment and the total number of personnel remains unavailable to the public. Most of the data and documents related to human resources management has secrecy classification of “confidential” or higher. The Decision on determining the degree of secrecy of data in the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces from 2016 allowing the Ministry to deny access to a broad range of information and documents and classify entire categories of documents under various degrees of secrecy caused serious backsliding in transparency, as pointed out by the civil society. On the other hand, information on staff turnover disaggregated by rank was delivered upon FOI request.

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All other countries share the number of personnel upon FOI request, while Croatia has the number of personnel disaggregated into military ranks available on the Army’s website, albeit the data is from 2020. Croatia and Montenegro include information on staff turnover in annual defence reports, with the latter having this data disaggregated by ranks. Both countries also share information on number of applicants for voluntary military service, and so does North Macedonia, whose defence report for 2022 states that due to withdrawal of both submitted applications, the program wasn’t implemented in the first part of last year as planned.

GENDER

Croatia, Montenegro and North Macedonia have national action plans for implementation of the UNSCR 1325 in place, while Albania never adopted the second generation of the NAP, like the rest of the countries did. The NAPs of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia expired in 2022 and 2020 respectively. In December 2022, Serbian Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue opened a call for civil society organizations to participate in the working group for drafting the new national action plan. The last available report on the implementation of the previous NAP, which covered the period from 2017 to 2020, was published in the same month. Moreover, in March 2022, MOD of Serbia formed the Office for gender equality, tasked with implementation of activities related to UNSCR 1325.

Croatia, Montenegro and North Macedonia have NAP in place and regularly publish reports on their implementation. While the last available report on Croatia covers the period 2019-2020, or the first two years of their NAP, Montenegro and North Macedonia report on the implementation of NAP annually. Bosnia and Herzegovina published a report concerning the entire period of NAP implementation, from 2018 till 2022. While these reports do explain activities and programs the Ministries have done to improve the position of women in defence sector, they are not standardized and are hard to compare. Moreover, it is not always possible to link projects and programs with concrete improvements in this area. While Croatia has the percentage of women in the defence sector available on the website of the Ministry of Defence, other countries deliver this data upon FOI request or publish it in annual defence reports.

Even though military expenditure in the Balkans region experienced a slow increase in the course of the last five years, it was only Serbia that surpassed the 2% GDP spending threshold. Albania and North Macedonia have reached the 2% threshold in the planned budget for 2023. Serbia gradually increased its defence spending since 2016 and, along with Croatia, experienced a sizeable leap in 2021. Bosnia and Herzegovina has the lowest military expenditure in the region, maintaining it below 1% of GDP.

All the countries in the Balkans publish their defence expenditure as part of government budgets and balance sheets of total government expenditure. However, different countries use different methods to present their defence expenditure, usually providing only the aggregated sums of larger categories, which makes it difficult to isolate and scrutinise individual costs. Albanian MoD budget is the least transparent in the region, showing only several general categories, while Croatian is the most transparent and detailed.

1 The research team used publicly available data on defence expenditure (MoDs expenditure) that were included in the government expenditure documents. Defence expenditure was extracted from balance sheets (i.e. actual spending) wherever possible, while the most recent Budget Law amendments were taken into account for the year 2022. Data for 2023 are plans, based on initial budget laws. In the charts, letter p is used to mark plans. Information on GDP in selected countries was taken from the database of the International Monetary Fund. Defence spending is presented in EUR, calculated based on the exchange rate of the national currencies at the end of the given year.
As regards budget structure, if we look at the 2021 expenditure, Bosnia and Herzegovina stands out as a country that spent almost 90% of its defence budget on personnel, whereas Serbia’s portion of the budget spent on personnel amounted to 35%. Serbia and Croatia spend more than 20% of their defence budgets on arms and equipment – Serbia since 2017, when it started its modernisation process, and Croatia since 2021, when it purchased Dassault Rafale fighter jets.

With the exception of Albania, defence expenditure of Western Balkan NATO members reported to the Alliance differs to a great extent when compared to the government balance sheets. The differences are predominantly caused by the NATO expenditure methodology that includes military pensions, which are not part of the funds for Ministries of Defence in national budgets.

Category titled Other costs includes operations, maintenance, infrastructural investments, etc. and could not be divided into separate categories because of different national budgets. Albania is not included in the comparison of the defence budgets structure because its budget and balance sheets show only highly aggregated categories of costs; hence, it was impossible to derive personnel and arms and equipment spending comparable to other countries. For more information on the Albanian defence budget structure reported to NATO, see the national chapter.

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Albanian defence expenditure has experienced a steady increase since 2017, with the exception of 2020, when spending on defence stagnated. Even though it has not reached the NATO goal of 2% of GDP, the defence expenditure’s share in Albania’s total government expenditure increased from 4.5% in 2017 to almost 9% planned for 2022.

The Albanian defence spending does not deviate significantly from the budget (+- 4%). In fact, it is usually slightly underspent.

The Albanian defence budget is the least transparent and detailed in the region, as it shows only several general categories: Planning, Management and Administration, Combat Forces, Military Education, Combat Support and Health Support. Hence, the publicly available information makes the budget structure and the amounts spent on personnel, or on arms and equipment, inconclusive.

Data provided to NATO show that the gradual rise of the Albanian defence expenditure can be attributed to small increases in the arms and equipment spending each year. On the other hand, personnel costs have faced a downward trend since 2017. In 2022, Albania announced the procurement of Javelin anti-tank missiles and Bayraktar drones.

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1 The Albanian budget structure graph was designed using information from the NATO database. Since it could not be derived from the government balance sheets or budgets due to the highly aggregated structure of the documents, it should not be directly compared with the budget structure of other countries in this report.
The military expenditure of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been almost the same in the past five years, both nominally and as the share of GDP.¹

The Parliamentary Assembly has not adopted a federal budget in a timely manner since 2018. The budget is usually adopted during, or at the end of, the year to which it pertains. Due to a political crisis, the federal budget for 2021 was not been adopted at all, and quarterly decisions on temporary financing were adopted on the basis of the 2020 expenditure. The 2022 budget was adopted only in July, while the budget for 2023 has not been adopted yet. Balance sheets, presenting the actual expenditure, are adopted regularly and in a timely fashion.

Almost 90% of the defence budget in 2021 and 2022 was spent on personnel due to the political deadlock, which obstructed planning and allocation of resources. Bosnia and Herzegovina generally spends the largest portion of its defence budget on personnel costs, while the arms and equipment share has not exceeded 4% since 2017.

Budget and balance sheets contain aggregated sums and sources of funding for rather general categories of expenses. For instance, arms and equipment expenses can be found under the aggregated category Equipment Procurement. The documents also include narrative reports with the rationale behind some general categories, i.e. monthly personnel turnover.

Due to the complexity of the budget system, it is methodologically challenging to calculate the military expenditure of BiH as a share of the total government expenditure, comparable to other countries in the region. Namely, the two entities have independent budgets that, then, allocate funds upward to the federal budget, which includes the defence budget.

¹ Due to the complexity of the budget system, it is methodologically challenging to calculate the military expenditure of BiH as a share of the total government expenditure, comparable to other countries in the region. Namely, the two entities have independent budgets that, then, allocate funds upward to the federal budget, which includes the defence budget.
Croatian military expenditure had a sharp increase in 2021 due to the contract on the purchase of 12 French Dassault Rafale fighter jets that was signed at the end of the year. Before that, the expenditure did not experience any large changes, either nominally, or as a military burden. Defence expenditure has taken up around 3.50% of the total government expenditure until 2021.

The Croatian Parliament regularly adopts the budget for the forthcoming year in late November or early December. The Parliament also regularly adopts balance sheets and yearly Reports on Defence.

The 2021 increase is entirely attributed to the Rafale purchase at the end of the year, which resulted in a rebalance and a 43% increase in the planned budget. Prior to that, there were no significant fluctuations during the year, and the initial budget was slightly underspent.

Croatia spent the largest portion of its military budget on personnel; however, the above purchase changed the planned budget structure in favour of arms and equipment. The Croatian defence budget is the most transparent and disaggregated in the region. Unlike the budgets of other countries, it shows major procurements individually and breaks them down into subcategories.
Montenegrin defence expenditure experienced a big increase right after the country joined NATO, in 2018 and 2019, caused by the attempt to meet the commitments made to the Alliance. However, it went back to its earlier level in 2020. Besides the pandemic, the change of government after the 2020 elections and the subsequent political crisis have certainly also influenced the overall budget and defence planning for the forthcoming period.

The Parliament adopted the 2021 budget after a delay of more than six months. Earlier, the Government would usually provide a budget proposal to the Parliament one month before the start of the next budget year. The Parliament has never adopted any balance sheet submitted by the government, even though it is legally required to do so.

Montenegro spends the biggest share of its defence budget on personnel. This trend was shortly interrupted by the increase in arms and equipment expenditure in 2018 and 2019, when Montenegro started the procedure to procure Bell helicopters and Oshkosh armoured vehicles. Nevertheless, big leaps in defence spending during the year, allocated to arms and equipment, suggest general lack of long-term defence planning in Montenegro.

Even though the Montenegrin budget demonstrates a slightly higher level of transparency than those of most countries in the region (i.e. it shows individual projects or procurement), it still lacks sufficient transparency and disaggregation.
North Macedonian defence expenditure increased approximately 30% from 2017 to 2020. Further increases were planned after the country became a member of NATO in 2020. Before that, it was spending roughly 1% on the military. Defence expenditure has taken up an increasing portion of the total government spending, from 2.7% in 2017 to 5.2% that was planned for 2023.

The Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia usually adopts budget laws in late December, while balance sheets are adopted regularly, with some occasional delays. The MoD regularly publishes semi-annual budget realisation reports.

North Macedonian defence budget changed in 2021, when the country signed the contract to procure Stryker light armoured vehicles. This purchase altered the budget structure in favour of arms and equipment.

Similar to other countries in the region, North Macedonia uses programme budgeting, but the budget is not sufficiently disaggregated. Budgets and balance sheets show highly aggregated sums for different programmes, and sources of funding are presented for the entire MoD budget.
Serbian defence expenditure kept gradually rising since 2016, with a sharpest increase in 2021. Military spending took up an increasing share of the total expenditure, from 4% in 2017 to almost 8% in 2022.

The National Assembly usually adopts the budget for the forthcoming year in early December. Balance sheets presenting the actual budget spending were late for 16 years, and the National Assembly retroactively adopted all of them in 2019.

The Serbian defence budget undergoes major changes as the year progresses. Resources are allocated from budget reserves, predominantly for arms and equipment. In the absence of extraordinary circumstances that would require extreme measures, such radical increases indicate lack of comprehensive defence planning.

Serbia has been applying programme budgeting since 2015. The budget is therefore broken down into programmes, presenting budget funds for specific areas as well as different sources of funds. Still, the budget is not sufficiently disaggregated and detailed, which prevents comprehensive oversight. For instance, arms and expenditure costs are not disaggregated by concrete projects, making it impossible to connect them to individual procurements.

As can be seen from the budget structure, the upsurge in the military budget is the result of increasing arms and equipment costs, but also a gradual increase in personnel costs since 2021. In line with the above, a trend of decreasing the amount of other costs (which includes maintenance and operational costs) can be observed.
In 2022, the year of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, four of the six analysed Western Balkan countries continued their international military cooperation in the context of their obligations as NATO member states. Although Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a member of the Alliance, most of Sarajevo’s international military cooperation still revolves around NATO and its members. Serbia remains the regional outlier, upholding its military neutrality and foreign policy based on geopolitical balancing.

As regards to military exercises, NATO member states - Albania, Croatia, Montenegro and North Macedonia - conduct their exercises within the NATO framework and with major NATO member states, including primarily the US, but also countries like the UK, Turkey and France. Even in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country that is not a member of NATO and where there is no consensus among the constituent entities and ethnic groups on the country’s membership in the Alliance, NATO and its members dominate the agenda when it comes to international military cooperation.

There were also exercises that were aimed to demonstrate that armed forces can operate in accordance with NATO standards. The “Combined Effort 22” exercise by Bosnia and Herzegovina was conducted following NATO procedure - NATO Evaluation Level-2 (NEL-2), intended to evaluate the capability of units at the level of a light infantry battalion to operate in multinational operations. The “Flash 22” exercise by North Macedonia assessed the combat readiness of a light infantry battalion, based on the Standards for the Evaluation of Ground Commands and units of the NATO Joint Operations Command – CREVAL (Combat Readiness Evaluation).

In 2022, Serbia was the only country in the region that did not engage in international military exercises, based on the Government’s decision to abort all activities related to military exercises due to the war in Ukraine. This was not the first time Belgrade made this type of decision. In late 2020, Serbia cancelled all its international military exercises for 6 months when it faced pressures from the EU as a result of the political crisis in Belarus. Serbia still has not completely isolated itself in terms of military and defence policy, as it continues to maintain international military cooperation with its international partners, practices foreign visits by the defence minister and head of the general headquarters, holds consultations with foreign partners, implements study visits, and educates Serbian officers at institutions abroad. Nevertheless, these two decisions demonstrate that Serbian defence policies are still being shaped by the policy of military neutrality, the Belgrade’s balancing act between Russia and the West, and the Kosovo dispute.

National Guards from US states are also among the partners with whom some Western Balkan countries conduct military exercises. For example, Albania is partnered with the New Jersey Army National Guard. Regional initiatives also serves as the framework under which the Western Balkan countries conduct their international military exercises, e.g. the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (ADRION) in the case of Croatia, which participated in the multinational naval exercise “ADRION LIVEX 2022” in June 2022. Military medical teams from Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina also participate in exercises organised under the umbrella of the Balkan Medical Task Force (BMTF), as they all did in October 2022, when they participated in the exercise PRESKOK 22 in Slovenia.

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1 European Western Balkans (EWB), Serbia suspends all military exercises for six months, NATO says they did not plan any, 10 Sept 2022, https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/09/10/serbia-suspends-all-military-exercises-for-six-months-they-werent-even-planned-with-nato/
The data was not always clear regarding military donations, but information provided by the relevant MoDs and public sources shows that the US, traditionally the biggest military donor to the Western Balkans, continued playing that role in the cases of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Significant military aid from the US was also announced for Montenegro, but it is not possible to determine whether this donation has materialised in 2022. The above should be viewed also in the context of the US announcing military aid to several countries in the region, to back them up in the wake of the Ukraine war.2

Albania experienced a shift, as Turkey - traditionally the second biggest military donor to this country - surpassed the US with the monetary value of its donations in 2022. The UK was the biggest military donor in North Macedonia, mostly because of the donation of mobile training units for urban operations. Based on the information provided by the MoD and obtained from public sources, the few rare donations to Serbia in 2022 included IT equipment to be used to promote gender equality, received from the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).3 Another donation of medical equipment consisted of a 64-slice scanner and a mobile X-ray machine of unspecified monetary value, which the US embassy in Belgrade donated to the Military Medical Centre “Karaburma”.4

What is new in 2022 compared to the previous year is that NATO member states in the Western Balkans have sent their troops to participate in NATO’s forward-deployed forces aimed at strengthening NATO’s eastern flank and deterring Russia. This was the case with NATO’s enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Latvia, where Albania, North Macedonia and Montenegro dispatched their troops; the enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group Poland (eFPBG-POL), where Croatia sent its troops; the NATO enhanced Vigilance Activities (eVA) in Bulgaria, where North Macedonia and Montenegro are present; and the NATO enhanced Vigilance Activities (eVA) in Romania, where North Macedonian troops are stationed. The Western Balkan countries continue to participate in more or less the same peace missions as in 2021. In some cases, there was a discrepancy regarding data; namely, the Albanian MoD mentioned 27 troops in NATO’s KFOR mission in Kosovo, while KFOR’s website talks about 61 troops.5

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, due to the blockade in the state institutions, the country also experienced a temporary blockade related to the rotation of contingents of the Armed Forces. Once the new collective Presidency was formed, a decision followed to continue participating in all the missions in which the country used to participate.6 Sarajevo participates in the UN and EU-led missions but not in NATO missions at the moment, most probably due to a lack of consensus in the country regarding NATO. When it comes to Serbia, in line with Belgrade’s policy of neutrality, the country continues to participate in the UN and EU missions while not sending any troops to those of NATO, not even under the auspices of the Partnership for Peace (PiP) programme.
The US and Turkey are traditionally the two largest military donors in Albania. The same was in 2021. The only difference compared to the previous year is that, in 2022, the overall value of Turkey's donation was higher than that of the US. From the Government of the Republic of Turkey, Albania received goods in the amount of USD 2,088,500, while from the Government of the United States of America it received goods in the amount of USD 1,436,136. Open-source research could only identify that Ankara has donated 40 vehicles (cars and buses) to the Albanian Armed Forces.
KFOR’s website indicates that the number of Albanian troops participating in the mission is 61, showing a great discrepancy between various sources on the exact number.
It is estimated that the US was a great source of donations to the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2022. That year, the US Congress approved USD 23 million in aid to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the form of two new helicopters to develop helicopter capacities within its Armed Forces. This package, besides the helicopters themselves, also included spare parts, multi-annual maintenance and pilot training.\(^1\)

In July 2021, Bosnia and Herzegovina also received a donation of 21 Humvees (High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle - HMMWV), valued at USD 2.6 million. This donation was part of the bigger package of 86 HMMWV vehicles worth USD 14.3 million. These vehicles will be delivered as the production continues. 79 of 86 vehicles were delivered to date, starting from 2016.\(^2\)

**DONATIONS**

1. Response of the Press Office of the US Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina
2. Ibid.
Bilaterally, Bosnia and Herzegovina also received EUR 1.1 million (USD 1.14 million) from Germany, for repairing military infrastructure related to army barracks. Unlike in 2021, there is no record of military donations from Turkey and China. Bosnia and Herzegovina received donations from multilateral and regional institutions. Among them was a EUR 10 million donation from the EU as part of an assistance measure under the European Peace Facility (EPF), in the form of de-mining equipment, with transportation vehicles and ambulances to be supplied at a later date. Within the project “Safety and Security Upgrade of Bosnia and Herzegovina Ammunition and Weapons Storage Sites (SAFE-UP BiH)”, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) and state donors invested EUR 2 million in upgrading the country’s capacity to secure and manage arms and ammunition stockpiles during the five years of the project’s implementation. The South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) donated IT equipment of unspecified value to the Bosnian military, intended for the standardisation of the military training on gender.

No members of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina participated in peace missions in 2022. Due to the decision-making deadlock in the institutions, there was a temporary freeze in the rotation of contingents of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in peace missions. However, the new Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina decided to continue the participation of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in all three missions, implying that the exact number of troops will be the same as in 2021.
The United States appears to be the country’s biggest military donor, much like in 2021. In 2022, Croatia received two UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters from the US, estimated at USD 55 million. To assist Croatia in acquiring Bradley infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs), the US pledged to provide USD 51.1 million in European Recapitalisation Incentive Programme (ERIP) financial aid to Croatia, with Croatia being obliged to secure the remaining USD 145.3 million of the total transaction amounting to USD 196.4 million. Some sources noted that, with the arrival of Black Hawk helicopters, the US military assistance to Croatia reached USD 685 million. It is not possible to determine the accuracy of this assessment and whether it took into account the deal on Bradley vehicles, which was made in the same period.

Croatia remains active when it comes to military exercises and, based on public sources, it is estimated that it has participated in 14 such exercises in 2022. Some of them were conducted on a multilateral basis, with NATO. Bilateral military exercises have been conducted mostly with the US (5 exercises), but also with France (2 exercises) and the UK (1 exercise). Exercises related to special forces and maritime exercises were represented as well. Croatia also participated in a multinational naval exercise, “ADRION LIVEX 2022”, organised under the auspices of the regional Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (ADRION).

**DONATIONS**

The United States appears to be the country’s biggest military donor, much like in 2021. In 2022, Croatia received two UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters from the US, estimated at USD 55 million.
KFOR’s website indicates that the number of Croatian troops participating in the mission is 147, showing a discrepancy compared to the Croatian MoD’s website.
As extrapolated from open-source research, it is estimated that Montenegro participated in 17 military exercises in 2022. Most were organised under the auspices of NATO, with one bilateral naval exercise with Slovenia. The military medical team from Montenegro participated in the exercise that was organised by the Balkan Medical Task Force (BMTF).

DONATIONS

Norway donated USD 65,000 in medical equipment to Montenegro’s Military Medical Centre, including for combating the Coronavirus pandemic. Multilaterally, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) donated EUR 34,698 (USD 34,815) worth of equipment for classrooms intended for training members of the Armed Forces.

In 2022, the US Department of State has announced a donation to 17 of its European allies, of which USD 23 million is intended for Montenegro. It remains unclear whether said donation was implemented in 2022, but if it was, it would mean that the US is still the largest military donor to the country.\(^1\) While data on the exact amount was not specified, part of the US aid to Montenegro emphasised cyber-security.

\(^1\) Radio Slobodna Evropa, Vojna pomoć iz SAD za države Zapadnog Balkana, osim Srbije [Radio Free Europe - U.S. military assistance to Western Balkan countries, with the exception of Serbia], 19 Sept 2022, [https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/state-department-vojna-pomoc-zapadni-balkan/32040703.html](https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/state-department-vojna-pomoc-zapadni-balkan/32040703.html)
MULTINATIONAL OPERATIONS

MONTENEGRO

LATVIA - BULGARIA
NATO (EFP) / NATO (EVA) 60

KOSOVO
NATO - KFOR 2

IRAQ
NATO - IRAQ NMI 1

WESTERN SAHARA
UN - MINURSO 1

MALI
EU - EUTM MALI suspended 1

SOMALIA
EU - EU NAVFOR ATALANTA 1
In 2022, North Macedonia participated in 20 international military exercises. Five of these were bilateral - four were conducted with the US and one with Greece. The rest were multilateral exercises conducted through NATO and its Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme. Beyond these international exercises, North Macedonia also held one national exercise, “Flash 22”, intended to demonstrate that the army is combat-ready according to NATO standards, or more precisely, according to the Standards for Evaluation of Ground Commands and units of the NATO Joint Operations Command – CREVAL (Combat Readiness Evaluation).

DONATIONS

Based on data provided by the North Macedonian MoD, the UK’s donation to North Macedonia amounted to GBP 377,738 (USD 454,154; EUR 438,119) and involved two transactions. These transactions most likely concerned the delivery of 14 mobile training units for operations in the urban environment. The United Kingdom also made another donation to North Macedonia, valued at EUR 100,000 when presented in Euros. There is no data on whether this relates to training units or other donations. Although North Macedonia is one of the NATO allies that are expected to receive military aid from the US in light of the war in Ukraine, no information related to military donations from the US in 2022 was found while doing research.
In 2022, the Serbian Armed Forces did not participate in any international exercises, either bilateral or multilateral. The reason for this was the decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia that the Armed Forces were to abort all activities related to planning, preparing and conducting exercises with foreign partners. This decision was a direct result of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Before it was made, Serbia conducted exercises with both NATO and Russia, although always more with NATO members.

**DONATIONS**

The Serbian MoD reported only one donation in 2022 - of IT equipment valued at RSD 495,594 (slightly above EUR 4,215.70) - by the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), intended for promoting gender equality. Open-source research showed that Serbia also received medical equipment consisting of a 64-slice scanner and a mobile X-ray machine for the Military Medical Centre “Karaburma” from the US embassy. The value of this donation was never specified.

**TOP FOREIGN DONORS (2022)**

South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse

EUR 4,215.70
Although by 2023 most countries in the region have already adopted their second or third generation of ‘1325’ action plans, Croatia and North Macedonia are the only two that have valid action plans on women, peace and security. Strategic documents of other countries have expired, and there seems to be no political will to develop new ones.

Compared to the previous “Balkan Defence Monitor” report, MoDs’ have made progress in the area of collecting data and reporting on the representation of women in defence systems based on requests for access to information of public importance. Albania and Croatia are the only two countries that have almost reached the NATO commitment of 15% female members of the uniformed armed forces. In the remaining countries, women make up between 8% and 10% of the military personnel. However, Albania is the only one that has a quota for women in the army (15%), which could influence further admission of women into the armed forces.

When it comes to the share of uniformed women among officers, Albania, North Macedonia and Montenegro have a higher percentage of female officers than Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serbia is still the country with the highest participation of women among the enlisted personnel. Women perform mostly civilian jobs in the defence system, making up half of the civil servants in Croatia and Serbia. Montenegro stands out because more than two thirds of civil servants employed in its MoD are women. This is not the case in North Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where women make up between 30 and 43% of the civilian personnel.

Throughout the region, the percentage of women in command and leadership positions is low and ranges from 4 to 8%, with the exception of Croatia with 12% of women in command positions. Still, all the countries have recorded a slight increase in women's participation in command positions. In most countries, the highest ranking women in the military are colonels. The rank of general is still held by only two women in the region: one in the Albanian Armed Forces and one in the Croatian Armed Forces. Serbia is still the only country that has never appointed a woman as defence minister.

Participation of women in peacekeeping missions is generally low (5-7%), with the exception of Serbia, which deploys approximately 15% of female members of the armed forces to UN and EU peacekeeping operations. No members of the Ministry of Security and the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina are currently engaged in peacekeeping missions.

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1 Enlisted personnel refers to the soldiers up to NATO OR-3 ranks.
National Action Plan 1325: Most countries have already adopted the second generation of action plans, except for Albania, which was the last in the region to adopt the first Action Plan in 2018. The Albanian Action Plan expired in 2020 and there seems to be no political will to draft a new one. The Ministry of Defence however states that it complies with other gender-related documents, such as the newly adopted National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021-2030. The Ministry is focused on fulfilling three strategic goals: promoting and enhancing women's leadership in the military, increasing women's participation in missions and operations, and increasing the number of women in the Albanian military representations in NATO command structures and the number of women in diplomatic missions.

Participation of women in the MoDs and the Armed Forces: The total number of employees in the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces is 7,749, of which 19.98% are women. This constitutes a slight increase of 0.58% compared to 2021. The representation of women in the Albanian Armed Forces is 14.98% (892 women out of 5,953 personnel), which is an increase of 0.66% compared to 2021. Albania thus met the NATO goal of 15% of female uniformed personnel in the armed forces. However, Albania is the only country in the region with the quota for women in the army (15%) that can affect their further admission. The increase of representation of women in the armed forces is slow; namely, the percentage of women military personnel in the armed forces in 2011 was 12.3%, in 2012 – 13.42%, while in 2013 it decreased to 11.2%. Still, Albania had the highest share of women officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) in 2022 – 21.01% of the officers (365 out of the total of 1,737) and 13.78% of the non-commissioned officers (348 out of the total of 2,525), while female enlisted personnel make up 10.58% (179 out of the total of 1,691), which is an increase of 1.94%. The percentage of women among the civil employees in the MoD is 36.56%. In other words, out of 1,795 civil servants, 657 are women.

Representation of women in command and leadership positions: Female officers who perform duties of commander and deputy commander make up 8.25% (35 women out of 424). The highest rank of women in the Albanian Armed Forces is that of Major General. This rank is held by Manushaqe Shehu, who became the first female Deputy Chief of General Staff of the Albanian Armed Forces in 2018. Until recently, Albania had two women defence ministers, who headed the Ministry from 2013 to 2020. Mrs. Olta Xhaçka was the second woman to be appointed Minister of Defence (2017–2020) after Mrs. Mimi Kodheli, who led the defence sector for four consecutive years. There are also other decision-making positions held by women, such as that of Deputy Defence Minister.

Participation of women in peacekeeping operations: As at 21 December 2022, 16 out of 324 military personnel participating in missions are women, which is 5%. This represents a slight decrease compared to 2019, when 7% of women participated in NATO operations.  


Participation of women in the MoDs and the Armed Forces: The number of members of the Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defence is limited by the Law on the Budget of BiH Institutions and by international obligations of BiH to have 10,000 professional military personnel (generals, officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers) and 1,000 civilians employed in the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina.1 The total number of employees in the defence system is currently 8,482, and women make up 8.2% of professional military personnel (674). According to data from 2023, the number of women among the civil servants and employees in the MoD is currently 100, which is 43.1% of total number of civil servants (232). When it comes to the share of uniformed women among officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and soldiers, Bosnia and Herzegovina has 6.7% female officers (120), 4.9% NCOs (127) and 11.1% soldiers (427). Compared to 2019, there is a decrease in the representation of women in the total number of professional military personnel and civil servants, but there is also a slight increase in female officers and soldiers.

Representation of women in command and leadership positions: There are currently 106 women in leadership and commanding positions, i.e. 4.2% of the total number of employees in the MoD and AF. The highest rank held by women in the Armed Forces of BiH is still that of Colonel, while a woman headed the Ministry of Defence from 2015 to 2019.

Participation of women in peacekeeping operations: There are currently no members of the Ministry of Security and the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina engaged in peacekeeping missions.

National Action Plan 1325: Croatia is currently implementing the second Action Plan 1325 on women, peace and security for the period 2019–2023. In November 2021, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs published its first report on the implementation of the National Action Plan 1325 for 2019 and 2020.¹

Participation of women in the MoDs and the Armed Forces: According to the annual defence report (2022), the number and share of women among the personnel employed in the Ministry of Defence and the Croatian Army is constantly increasing. Of the 15,008 active military personnel on 31 December 2021, 2,019 were women (13.45%). As at 31 December 2021, there were 1,003 women, i.e. 50.7% of the 1,982 employees in the categories of civil servants and state employees. The latest data on the proportion of women among officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and soldiers are not available. Still, the Croatian government assesses that Croatia ranks among the top NATO member countries in terms of the level of representation of women in the armed forces and regulated rights in the field of gender equality.

Representation of women in command and leadership positions: The share of women in command and leadership positions was 12.04%. According to the MoD’s annual defence report, a total of 13.86% of women were promoted to a higher rank in 2021. The number of women with the rank of General has stagnated since 2014, with a single female officer holding that rank (Brigadier General).

Participation of women in peacekeeping operations: According to the MoD’s annual defence report (2022), the proportion of women in peace support operations and missions abroad was 6.93%. However, submitting the report to the parliamentary Defence Committee, the minister Mario Banožić said that “in 2021, Croatia continued to actively participate in NATO, EU and UN peace support operations, missions and activities, with 643 members of its armed forces, including 48 women (7.47%)”.²

National Action Plan 1325: Montenegro's second Action Plan 1325 on women, peace and security expired in 2022. However, there is no information whether the Government of this country has taken any steps to develop the third one. Nonetheless, the Government of Montenegro regularly publishes reports on the implementation of NAP 1325, making it the most transparent in the region.

Participation of women in the MoDs and the Armed Forces: Montenegro is the country with the highest share of women among the civil servants and employees in the MoD. More than two thirds of the civil servants employed in the MoD are women (66.25%). Representation of women among professional military personnel has increased slightly, from 10.35% in 2022 to 10.77%. When it comes to the share of women among officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and soldiers, their number in the ranks of officers and professional soldiers is relatively high - 16.86% of the officers and 14.29% of the soldiers. The representation of women among non-commissioned officers (NCOs) is 5.21%.

Representation of women in command and leadership positions: In 2020, Montenegro appointed a woman to the position of defence minister for the first time. Ms. Olivera Injac served as Minister of Defence of Montenegro from 4 December 2020 until 28 April 2022, in the Government of Zdravko Krivokapić. According to the Ministry of Defence, the share of women in leadership and command positions is 6.96%.

Participation of women in peacekeeping operations: According to the Ministry of Defence, the share of women in the total number of members participating in peacekeeping operations outside of Montenegro is 10%.

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National Action Plan 1325: North Macedonia is currently implementing its second Action Plan 1325 on women, peace and security for the period 2020-2025.¹

Participation of women in the MoDs and the Armed Forces: According to the Ministry of Defence, women currently (2022) make up 30.86% of the civilian staff and 10.66% of the armed forces. The share of women among officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and soldiers increased moderately compared to the last year’s survey. North Macedonia has 18.16% of women with the ranks of officers, 11.87% of the NCOs and 5.78% of the soldiers. Although the percentage of women in operational jobs has increased, women generally still work in civilian positions in the defence system.

Representation of women in command and leadership positions: North Macedonia is one of the three countries in the region that have appointed women as defence ministers. The share of women among the total number of officers in the Armed Forces is 10.93%.

Participation of women in peacekeeping operations: According to the Ministry of Defence, 4.92% of women are currently deployed to peacekeeping operations. This is a significant drop compared to 2019, when North Macedonia deployed 8% of its uniformed women to peacekeeping operations.

National Action Plan 1325: Serbia's second Action Plan for the implementation of the Resolution 1325 expired in 2020. In 2022, the Ministry of Defence formed a new organisational unit within its human resources sector - the Gender Equality Office, with the aim of improving gender equality in the defence sector. The Office will be responsible for the preparation of the third action plan.

Participation of women in the MoDs and the Armed Forces: Military service recently became quite popular in Serbia, both among young women and young men. In the last two years, more girls than boys have enrolled in the Military Gymnasium and Military Vocational High School in Belgrade. Currently, there are 34% female cadets at the Military Academy, while at the Medical Faculty of the Military Medical Academy (VMA) the number of women is greater than 70%.

In principle, all positions are available to women and they are represented even in the special forces’ units such as the Military Police Detachment for Special Purposes - “Cobras” or the 72nd Special Operations Brigade of the Serbian Armed Forces. Statistics from the Ministry of Defence show that the share of women among non-uniformed personnel (civilians) in the MoD and in the Serbian Armed Forces (SAF) is currently 54.23%, while the representation of women in the total number of professional military personnel is 10.59%. Similar to many other countries in the region, women are engaged mostly in civilian positions within the defence system. When it comes to the share of women among officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and soldiers, Serbia has the highest percentage of women who are professional soldiers – 17.66%. However, a similar trend is not present in the higher ranks, as only 10.24% of women serve as officers and 3.63% of women as NCOs. Still, a slight increase has been noted in all the categories compared to the previous “Balkan Defence Monitor”.

Representation of women in command and leadership positions: Women are still under-represented in leadership positions, with 26.88% of them in managerial positions in the MoD and 6.23% holding command positions in the Serbian Armed Forces. The highest rank held by women in the Serbian Armed Forces is still that of Colonel. Serbia is still the only country that has never appointed a woman as defence minister.

Participation of women in peacekeeping operations: Currently, out of 283 members of the Serbian Armed Forces participating in four UN peacekeeping operations and three EU missions, 43 are women (15.09%). In 2022, there were 88 women in peacekeeping operations.

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1 Vojkan Kostić, Vojni poziv u Srbiji sve popularniji među ženama [Military service is becoming ever more popular among women in Serbia], Balkan Security Network, 21 Jan 2023, https://www.balkansec.net/post/vojni-poziv-u-srbiji-sve-popularniji-me%C4%91u-%C5%BEenama
Balkan Defence Monitor

Strategic Documents

BCSP
Belgrade Centre for Security Policy
It must be underscored that even without the Ukraine war, adopting new strategies in the defence and national security domain has been a traditionally slow process for the Western Balkan countries, burdened with bureaucratic and political hurdles. Bosnia and Herzegovina is one the most extreme examples, as the country’s last valid strategic documents remain the National Security Strategy of 2006 and the National Defence Strategy of 2008. This can largely be explained by the country’s dysfunctional politics and complicated state apparatus. North Macedonia has not adopted a national security strategy since 2003, but it adopted a national defence strategy in 2020. Nevertheless, this also points to the lack of genuine strategic planning in the defence policies of individual countries, as defence policy is an extension of the wider rubric of national security policy. Compared to the previous year, none of the Western Balkan countries adopted new strategies, neither when it comes to national security strategy nor national defence strategy. This stands in stark contrast to the changes in the wider European and global security environment brought about by the Ukraine war.

As such, given that the old documents are still in force without new strategies being adopted, the official policies of the Western Balkan countries revolve around the familiar themes. As per old doctrinal documents, the military invasion continues to be defined as a possible but not probable security threat. Nationalism, separatism, economic instability, terrorism and organised crime are mostly defined as national security threats by all countries of the region in their extant documents. International peacekeeping and regional cooperation in emergencies are also major strategic goals in these documents.

The Euroatlantic agenda remains the dominant context of the extant strategic documents. The EU membership remains an important goal for all the countries in the region and important for each country’s national security policy. In terms of NATO, NATO membership or the pursuit thereof is defined as a major element of each country’s defence and security policy, with the exception of Serbia, which continues to uphold its policy of proclaimed military neutrality.

The war in Ukraine will almost certainly force the Western Balkan countries to draft and adopt new defence and security strategies in light of the dramatic changes in the European and global security environment. The first to do so will most likely be the countries that are members of NATO: Albania, Croatia, Montenegro and North Macedonia, as NATO adopted its own new strategic concept in 2022. As expected, Russia dominates the agenda in the context of its war against Ukraine; namely, in NATO’s new 11-pages long document strategic document, Russia is mentioned 14 times. In contrast, China is mentioned only twice, once as a threat and second in the context of its partnership with Russia.


In the extent strategic document, Russia and China do not have a prominent place. The Croatian 2017 national security strategy does not mention China and Russia. There is only one mention of Ukraine in the context of the altered European security environment in the wake of the original Ukraine crisis of 2014. In Montenegro’s 2018 national security strategy, Russia and China are not explicitly mentioned. Still, there is mention of hybrid threats and the fact that Montenegro has already been a target of these threats, a reference to Russia’s involvement in the alleged 2016 coup. Russia and China are not mentioned in the Albanian national security strategy of 2014. The same goes for the North Macedonian national defence strategy of 2020, the country’s most recent strategic document.

NATO’s increased focus on Russia and security matters in wider Eastern Europe is highly likely to force NATO members in the Western Balkans to re-examine their national security strategies, leading to the adoption of new documents and policies. This will not be an easy task for most of these countries. Montenegro is engulfed in a constitutional and political crisis, where it remains unclear who the new president will be and which parties will form the new government. North Macedonia could also face political instability if nationalist parties strengthened by the failure of the country’s advancement towards the EU make a comeback. Due to the lack of elemental political stability in these countries, it will not be possible to conduct a major national security policy debate, which will be sidelined to make room for more pressing matters.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the possibility of progress in adopting new strategies was a distant prospect even before the Ukraine war started. The country continues to be burdened by dysfunctional institutions and political and ethnic divisions. In light of the opposition from the Serbian entity, the Republika Srpska, NATO membership - a foreign policy goal defined by old and outdated strategic documents, is one of many issues around which there is no consensus in the country. Serbia will also face a challenge in re-adjusting its national security policy and strategic documents. The country is kept busy by its balancing act between Russia and the West, the unresolved Kosovo dispute, while domestically the ruling elite are faced with a combustible public opinion where Russia remains extremely popular and NATO extremely unpopular. This combination of factors makes it difficult for Serbia to re-adjust its policies and strategic documents.

National interests and goals (as defined in the Strategies): Protection and consolidation of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the Republic of Albania // Strengthening fundamental freedoms, human rights and the rule of law // Protection and promotion of the interests of Albanians wherever they may be // Preservation and development of national identity

Main threats: Organised crime // Corrupt individuals // Terrorism // Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and long-range weapons

Main principles of national security policy: Accountability and transparency // Activities of the Armed Forces based on the Constitution and subject to democratic control of competent institutions // Small, efficient and profiled force based on personnel rather than heavy weaponry // Promoting gender equality and increasing women's participation

Regional cooperation: Peace, stability and prosperity in the region are of strategic importance to Albania. Our interest is to have a region that is integrated into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures, where inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony reigns. This will be realised through good neighbourly relations, cooperation in good faith, respect for minorities and inclusion. Relations between the countries of the region have improved, and cooperation has increased both qualitatively and quantitatively. Integration processes are catalysts for democratic reform, cooperation, good neighbouring relations and the reconciliation process. Promoting sustainable economic development will be achieved through deep regional economic integration aimed at creating an open and free regional market as a precondition for the region's European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Regional threats: Problems in the region can still be caused by extreme nationalism. The existence of divided societies continues to pose a potential threat, due to the potential reopening of the border issue. Political exploitation and failure to exercise the rights of certain ethnic or minority groups could continue to cause sporadic tensions and generate negative consequences in bilateral and multilateral relations. Unresolved interstate disputes and problems can affect the quality of regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations, slowing down integration processes.

NATO membership: Membership in the North Atlantic Alliance is an inherent guarantee of national security, and the Republic of Albania is committed to fulfilling the obligations arising from said membership.

Relations with the EU: Albania's membership in the European Union is the country's most important strategic goal for the next decade. EU integration is also linked to the country's participation in the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy.

International military cooperation: Albania is committed to actively promoting regional and global peace and stability, increasing its role in regional and international organisations, and to participating in missions led by the UN, NATO and the EU.
National interests and goals (as defined in the Strategies): Protection and consolidation of National interests and goals (as defined in the Strategies): Establishing and developing security system institutions that will be able to respond to all risks and threats // Accession to international security conventions, European and Euro-Atlantic structures

Main threats: Political and social animosities caused by the war and nationalist extremism // Incomplete implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement // Problems related to political transition // Critical regional points, such as Kosovo and Metohija

Main principles of national security policy: Democratic, civilian control of the military and parliamentary oversight // Transparency of defence-related activities, including defence planning and budgeting // Integration into Euro-Atlantic collective security structures

Regional cooperation: Bosnia and Herzegovina has no territorial claims involving neighbouring and other states, nor does it perceive neighbouring and other states as hostile and a possible threat to its territorial integrity and sovereignty. Therefore, it is especially important that BiH further develops good neighbourly relations based on the principles of equality and cooperation. Improving good relations and cooperation with neighbours and countries in the wider region, the development of democratic processes in these countries, and the process of their European integration have a positive impact on strengthening the internal security of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Regional threats: South-east remains the most sensitive area of today's Europe. Efforts toward secession, autonomy and independence of certain ethnic groups are still present in this area, which, together with the relatively high concentration of military capacities, further complicates the overall security situation.

Relations with NATO: The key element for achieving the unquestionable collective military security of Bosnia and Herzegovina is to become a member of NATO, as in that case its national sovereignty and territorial integrity would be guaranteed by the Alliance. Membership in the Partnership for Peace is the first step in that direction. Further reform in the field of defence, which will lead to full professionalisation, equipping and training the BiH Armed Forces in accordance with NATO standards, will enable BiH to make a significant contribution to achieving the goals of the Security Policy in the future.

Relations with the EU: The commitment to gradual integration into the European Union implies readiness to accept the provisions, legal structure and organisational mechanisms of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy.

International military cooperation: As an active participant in collective security at the global level through membership in the United Nations, the OSCE and the Council of Europe, Bosnia and Herzegovina is engaged in international peace efforts.
National interests and goals (as defined in the Strategies): Security of the population // Territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Croatia // Strengthening the international reputation and influence of the Republic of Croatia // Ensuring the survival, protection of the identity and the political subjectivity of the Croatian people as constitutive in Bosnia and Herzegovina // Protection and support of Croats in other countries, and emigration

Main threats: Unresolved issues on delimitation with certain neighbouring countries // Political and intelligence activities of countries and non-state factors that perceive the European Union and NATO as a security threat // Terrorist attacks

Main principles of the national security policy: Parliamentary, professional and civil oversight of the legality of the work of the security and intelligence system // Inclusion of population in the civil protection system

Regional cooperation: The Republic of Croatia emphasises investing in the stability of the Southeast neighbourhood, viewing the Euro-Atlantic integration and the implementation of reforms as key factors and instruments for achieving stability and security. The Republic of Croatia will therefore systematically act in support of democratic processes, stabilisation, and access of countries in Southeast Europe to Euro-Atlantic integration. The Republic of Croatia will endeavour to seek a solution to the open issues of delimitation through direct negotiations or through proceedings before an international judicial body.

Regional threats: Political instability, underdeveloped state institutions, corruption, the high unemployment rate and social and ethnic tensions make the security situation in our Southeast neighbourhood fragile. Although Euro-Atlantic influence is still dominant, the space is also open to the influence of other global and regional actors and geopolitical competition and various destabilising external influences are reflected in this area as well. The Croatian neighbourhood shows trends of increasing intolerance, radicalism and extremism, especially Islamist radicalism.

NATO membership: For the Republic of Croatia, NATO is the guarantor of peace, stability and security. The membership of the Republic of Croatia in NATO provides a convincing guarantee of collective defence as an important factor in deterring and defending the population, territory, and national sovereignty. Appropriate military and civilian capabilities for deterrence and defence will be developed to carry out the tasks of the NATO Preparedness Action Plan as a contribution to the credibility of Allied solidarity and NATO cohesion.

EU membership: The Republic of Croatia will actively contribute to missions and operations within the Common Security and Defence Policy of the European Union and participate in the association and the sharing of initiatives and projects of the European Defence Agency.

International military cooperation: The Republic of Croatia will contribute to the efforts aimed at strengthening international security and stability by participating in international missions and operations, as well as crisis response operations of international organisations, in particular the United Nations, NATO, the European Union, OSCE, and the Council of Europe.
National interests and goals (as defined in the Strategies): Protection of sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Montenegro // Internal stability, protection of life and property of citizens and economic goods // Protection of democracy and rule of law, and guarantee and protection of human rights and freedoms

Main threats: Armed aggression // Terrorism and violent extremism // Proliferation of conventional arms and weapons of mass destruction // Cyber and hybrid threats // Organised crime

Main principles of national security policy: Development of military capacities and capabilities necessary for the execution of dedicated missions and tasks in the country and within the collective security system // Further development of military capabilities in line with the NATO defence planning process

Regional cooperation: The region generates a common vision of the future despite certain difficulties. Montenegro strives - through regional development cooperation and by enhancing transparency, dialogue and good neighbourly relations - to contribute to avoiding misunderstandings and improving security opportunities and stability in the region. Montenegro is committed to developing good neighbourly relations and strengthening regional co-operation, in terms of security as well as in other areas of common interest.

Regional threats: The region is still burdened by past events and unresolved issues that could cause destabilisation in certain areas. Geostategic shifts have made the Western Balkans once again a zone of strong interest of certain international actors whose primary goal is to prevent the further European and Euro-Atlantic path of some countries in the region. This imposes concrete actions on the region, especially those of a hybrid nature, which poses a serious security challenge and can have significant consequences for regional stability and slow down the integration processes.

NATO membership: Montenegro has recognised that the best guarantee of long-term and sustainable security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state is access to the collective and cooperative security and defence system brought about by NATO membership. Therefore, active participation in the collective security system, NATO activities, missions and operations is a key prerequisite for protecting Montenegro from armed threats and other identified threats to national security.

Relations with the EU: NATO membership has significantly strengthened Montenegro's international position and facilitated the achievement of another key foreign policy goal - accession to the European Union. EU membership will further improve the security climate in the region and strengthen Montenegro's capacity to respond to current challenges, risks, and threats.

International military cooperation: Montenegro contributes to international stability through active participation in EU missions and UN peacekeeping missions and operations. Montenegro is developing its capacity to participate in NATO missions, operations and other activities in line with its membership obligations.

Main threats: Insufficient economic growth // Corruption // Organised crime // Insufficient capacity and politicisation of democratic institutions // Foreign intelligence services delaying or hindering efforts to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic community // Radicalism and extremism // Terrorism // Illegal migration // Cyber threats.

Main principles of national security policy: Collective defence // Professionalism and adequate and equitable representation of communities // Application of the principle of gender equality in all the phases of defence policy and planning.

Regional cooperation: Regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations have a positive impact on security in the region. Countries in the region are aware that co-operation and good neighbourly relations are a precondition for building mutual trust, integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures and improving regional security, stability and economic growth. The Republic of Northern Macedonia sees full membership of all countries of the region in NATO or the EU as the best way to further improve and consolidate the security situation in the region of Southeast Europe and beyond.

Regional threats: The region remains burdened by its history and continues to face problems that can lead to instability. Differences of national, ethno-religious and cultural character and conflicting goals and interests can be a challenge to the security and safety of the region.

Relations with NATO and the EU: Strategic commitment to European and Euro-Atlantic integration and membership in collective defence and security systems remain a top priority of our defence policy, focused on joining NATO and the EU. After full membership in NATO and the EU, we will fully participate in collective defence and the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The military will maintain military capabilities which are compatible and interoperable with the NATO Code of Capabilities. It will also improve the existing capabilities and provide conditions for integration and adequate contribution of the national defence system to the collective defence of the Alliance.

International military cooperation: North Macedonia will develop strength and capabilities to participate in international peacekeeping and security operations and missions, in line with national security interests and international obligations. We will support regional and international peace, security and stability through active participation in NATO and EU-led operations and missions, as well as in international peacekeeping, humanitarian and observation operations led by the UN, and through participation in various forms of military cooperation at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels.
NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY: 2020

National interests and goals (as defined in the Strategies): Preserving sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity // Preserving internal stability and security // Protection of the Serbian people wherever they live // Preserving peace and stability in the region and the world // European integration and membership in the European Union

Main threats: Separatist aspirations // Ethnic and religious extremism // Covert activities of foreign factors // Organised crime // Illegal migration

Main principles of national security policy: Democratic standards // Cooperation policy // European foreign policy orientation // Military neutrality // Developing the concept of total defence

Regional cooperation: Regional security is increasingly based on joint and coordinated activities in the field of security, politics and economy, other areas aimed at preserving stability and preventing crises in this region, and on the common interest of the region's countries to join the European Union. Activities within the framework of regional initiatives and the construction of joint mechanisms for the prevention of risks and threats, and for crisis management, create conditions for the accession of all countries in the region to the European Union.

Regional threats: Ethnic and religious alienation, and different interpretations and attempts to revise history, are creating limitations in the process of stabilising the region. Other factors that threaten regional security are non-military threats, including separatist aspirations and ethnic, religious and political extremism. The risk of outbreak of wars and other armed conflicts in Southeast Europe, although reduced, have not been eliminated.

Relations with NATO: The development of partnership cooperation between the Republic of Serbia and NATO, based on the policy of military neutrality and through the Partnership for Peace programme, contributes to the stability of the Republic of Serbia and contributes to bilateral relations with the countries of the region that are members of NATO. The Republic of Serbia does not intend to become a member of NATO or any other military-political alliance.

Relations with the EU: Improving national security and defence through the process of European integration contributes to the full membership of the Republic of Serbia in the European Union. (Serbia) is firmly committed to contributing to the European Union's Common Foreign, Security and Defence Policy as part of the accession process and integrating into the concepts of that European policy.

International military cooperation: Through the participation of military and civilian capacities in multinational operations and missions of the United Nations, the European Union and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Republic of Serbia will improve its position as a reliable partner in international relations. Special attention will be paid to the trade in weapons and military equipment, because the suppression of illegal trade is a continuous commitment of the Republic of Serbia.