



# Balkan <sup>2024</sup> Defence Monitor



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# INTRODUCTION



The Balkan Defence Monitor is a regional report aiming to provide a comprehensive and credible annual update on defence sector in the six Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia). The third edition of the Balkan Defence Monitor once again highlights the need for addressing the lack of information and transparency related to defence policies and the importance of providing evidence-based alternatives to the existing narratives in the Balkans region.

Amid the ongoing wars in Ukraine and Gaza, and the EU's attempts to establish itself as an independent security provider, the defence issues are once again at the forefront of discussions. With Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia remaining non-NATO members, and other Balkan countries aiming to affirm their commitment to NATO in the current geopolitical circumstances, the Balkan region must determine its position in the European security order. The focus is on enhancing the Balkan countries' combat readiness, whether through an increase in defence expenditures, more international military exercises, or announcements of potential reinstatement of military conscription in Serbia.

The Balkan Defence Monitor 2024 applied the same methodology as in the case of its previous iterations of 2022 and 2023, a methodology based on analysing data provided by the Ministries of Defence (MoDs) of the Western Balkan countries based on their Freedom of Information (FOI) laws, and open-source research. The research team gathered data from December 2022 to December 2023. It must be noted that the Albanian MoD did not completely respond to the freedom of information request, proving that defence system transparency is still a problem in the Western Balkans. The five areas of annual defence policy trends in the Western Balkan region cover transparency, defence expenditures, international military cooperation (international military exercises, international military donations and participation in international peacekeeping missions), gender representation, and strategic documents.

## MAIN FINDINGS

**Transparency** remains a weak point for defence sectors across the region, despite some notable efforts by certain countries such as Montenegro. The incumbent leader in this area, Croatia, has actually recorded slight backsliding in transparency by bringing back classified procurements and by not publishing details on its donations to Ukraine, unlike many other NATO members. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia have all provided timely responses to requests for access to information. Albania has initially refused to respond but following a hearing session initiated by the national Information and Data Protection Commissioner, Albanian MoD delivered some of the requested data. All this has contributed to the assessment that Albania remains the least transparent country in the region.

When it comes to data related to human resources, Croatia and Montenegro publish extensive information in their annual defence reports, while Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia provide relevant data upon request. Serbia has classified a number of documents related to human resource management, making the total number of staff in the MoD and the military unavailable to the public. All countries have published or shared upon request the data on representation of women in the defence sector, while it should also be mentioned that Montenegro and North Macedonia have pages on their respective websites dedicated to gender equality.

After a couple of years marked by steady increase of **defence expenditure** across the region, this increase has slowed down in 2023. Serbia recorded the largest defence expenditure in the region and was again the only country to reach the 2% GDP defence spending threshold in 2023. However, based on planned budgets for 2024, Serbia will decrease its defence spending to 1.8%, while North Macedonia and Albania plan to increase their expenditure above the 2% threshold. It remains to be seen whether the actual expenditure will follow these plans, since in 2023 the two countries underspent their respective defence budgets by approximately 12%. Bosnia and Herzegovina has the lowest defence budget in the region and it accounts for less than 1% of its GDP.

Croatia has the most transparent and disaggregated budget in the region, and it is the only one referring to specific procurement projects, while Albanian budget is the least transparent, containing only seven general categories. When it comes to budget structures, most of them have undergone fluctuations in the last couple of years, which usually manifested in increased percentage of spending on arms and equipment compared to personnel. This reflects the large procurement projects realised in recent years. This trend is followed by Albania, Croatia and North Macedonia, while in the case of Serbia the 2024 budget brings an increase in spending on personnel compared to previous years.

Regarding **international military cooperation**, NATO and the US remain the dominant security actors. This is particularly visible when it comes to **international military exercises**, where most of the conducted exercises are multilateral NATO exercises or US-led multilateral exercises. This relates not only to NATO members but also to non-NATO members like Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. Serbia even exempted Serbia-hosted “Platinum Wolf 2023” exercise co-organised by United States European Command and Serbian Armed Forces from its moratorium on international military exercises that has been in force since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. There have been bilateral exercises with the US and with NATO members like the UK, France and Turkey. Some countries had a sharp rise in international exercises compared to 2022. North Macedonia participated in 31 exercises compared to 20 in 2022. In the case of Croatia, there are indications of soaring from 14 exercises in 2022 to 66 in 2023. It is evident that some countries want to prove their status as loyal NATO members in the context of the Russia-NATO security rivalry and that these countries want to increase their combat readiness through international military exercises.

The data on **international military donations** is less comprehensive, but findings show a more diverse picture. The US was the greatest military donor to Albania and Croatia.. The EU was the largest military donor to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia, and in the case of Montenegro, it was Turkey. The open-source research found no data on international military donations to Albania in 2023. The most striking finding is that China was the greatest military donor to Serbia in 2023 based on the March 2023 agreement on free military aid to Serbia worth 50 million Chinese yuan or EUR 6.700.000.<sup>1</sup> It would take much more than this to establish China as the dominant security partner for Western Balkan countries including Serbia, particularly due to geographical distance, but security cooperation with China might also be a long-term trend for countries like Serbia, that want to hedge their bets in the age of Sino-American rivalry.

There has been a continuity compared to 2022 regarding **international peacekeeping missions**, but there have also been changes. Croatia has experienced a major change. In NATO’s enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group Poland (eFPBG-POL), Croatia increased its participation from 4 to 72 members. Zagreb sent 178 soldiers to NATO’s enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group Lithuania (eFPBG-LTU) and 66 soldiers to NATO’s Enhanced Vigilance Activity Battle Group Hungary (eVA BG-HUN). Croatian participation in NATO Mission Iraq (NMI) almost doubled

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1. Response of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Serbia to the freedom of information request submitted by the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, received 9 January 2024

from 7 participants in 2022 to 13 in 2023, and its participation in the US-led “Inherent Resolve” mission stationed in Iraq to combat the Islamic State (IS) went from one to two soldiers. A major change happened in the case of Serbia. Serbia dispatched ten soldiers to a US-led mission in Sinai, Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) that oversees the 1978 Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel. This constitutes a break with practice where Serbia only dispatches troops to peace missions under the auspice of the UN or the EU as per Belgrade’s neutrality policy, but also Belgrade’s partial pivot towards Washington in the security policy domain.

In NATO’s enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Latvia, North Macedonia replaced the Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear defence (CBRN defence) team with an artillery unit, and it has apparently ended its participation in NATO Mission Iraq (NMI). No changes were noticed regarding Montenegro’s participation in multilateral peace missions compared to 2022. Bosnia and Herzegovina has two members of the armed forces in the UN mission MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo and three in the EUTM mission in the Central African Republic.

Albania increased its presence in NATO’s KFOR mission to 90. Within NATO enhanced Vigilance Activities (eVA) in Bulgaria, Albania dispatched an infantry platoon and two members of its armed forces to NATO Mission Iraq (NMI). Regarding the UN missions, Albania increased its participation in the UNMISS mission in South Sudan from two to three soldiers, and it has dispatched one expert to UNISFA, a UN mission in Abeyi territory disputed between South Sudan and the Republic of Sudan.

In terms of **strategic documents**, it has been established that none of the Western Balkan countries adopted new documents in 2023, neither the national security strategies nor national defence strategies. Traditionally, adopting new strategic and doctrinal documents is a long and complicated process even outside the Western Balkans. Still, no new strategic documents have been published despite the undeniable changes in the European and global security environment, showing that this process is burdened with bureaucratic and political dysfunctions and the dominance of political leaders. At this stage, Albania and North Macedonia are the only countries with indications that new strategic documents are being developed and that they might be adopted.

Some security threats mentioned in the old documents hold some salience in the current strategic environment. Nationalism and separatism are relevant in the context of the unresolved Kosovo dispute and political crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Organised crime is always high on the regional security agenda, irrespective of the strategic documents in force. Terrorism, as one of the security threats cited in the old documents, might become more acute in light of ongoing instability in the Middle East. Military invasion remains unlikely, as Western security provides deterrence and local countries lack the economic and demographic capacity for prolonged conflict.

Nevertheless, sporadic acts of violence cannot be discounted, and the same goes for economic instability. While these documents usually explain to both domestic and international audiences the logic guiding national security policy, in the Western Balkans, political elites strongly tend to execute security and defence policy without foundation in strategic and doctrinal documents. The constant announcements by Serbian leadership about the potential reinstatement of military conscription are examples of this phenomenon.

In the area of **women, peace, and security**, Montenegro has recently renewed its strategic documents, while North Macedonia still has a valid action plan. However, in other countries of the region, the WPS documents have expired, and some countries, like Serbia, are working on creating new plans. According to available data, Albania and Croatia have the highest percentage of women among uniformed personnel, while Montenegro leads in the percentage of women working as civilians in the defence sector. Serbia and Montenegro have the highest participation of women among enlisted personnel, while Albania and North Macedonia have the highest percentage of female officers. The participation of women non-commissioned officers is generally low throughout

the region, but Albania and North Macedonia are examples of good practice. Due to the relatively late admission to military schools and the still present glass ceiling in the army, women have a slow career development. Albania and Croatia are the only countries that have appointed women to the rank of brigadier general, while many women in other countries are waiting for higher appointments. Lastly, Serbia has the highest participation of women in multinational operations/missions, while Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia have the lowest participation of women in missions abroad.





**Balkan** 2024  
**Defence  
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# Transparency



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# TRANSPARENCY

## REGIONAL OVERVIEW



**Defence sector is traditionally known as one of the least transparent areas of government, not just in the Balkans, but globally. This is understandable due to its nature, but having in mind defence is one of the highest-spending sectors, increasing transparency in the defence sector is of great importance to increasing trust between the governments and the citizens.**

Judging by transparency levels in the region, substantial room for improvement still exists. The transparency levels in the region vary depending on the country and little has changed compared to last year's findings. Croatia has recorded slight backsliding, due to reintroducing the "Book 2" containing classified procurements among other things, but still remains at the top in the region when it comes to transparency of the defence sector. Montenegro is the runner-up in this segment and has moderately improved since last year. North Macedonia continues to demonstrate its commitment to transparency, while there is still room for improvement in terms of budgeting. Serbia is responsive to FOI requests and shares relevant documents on the website, but the legal arrangements adopted in 2016 and 2018 enabled entire categories of data to be classified, negatively affecting transparency. Bosnia and Herzegovina has one of the least transparent budgets and this year's response to the FOI request has omitted state donations, but the MoD website could be described as moderately transparent. Albania is still the least transparent, a finding solidified by the MoD's initial refusal to respond to the freedom of information request submitted by the partners of the BDM research team, followed by delivering only a portion of the requested information after the intervention of the national Information and Data Protection Commissioner.

All the countries have mechanisms for free access to public information in place, with some of them pointing that out on the defence ministries' websites or even publishing reports on the utilisation of this mechanism, as in the case of Croatia. For the purpose of this research, FOI requests were sent to the MoDs of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. All except Albania have delivered timely responses. The Albanian MoD invoked confidentiality as grounds for rejecting the request and refused to respond even after the intervention of the national Information and Data Protection Commissioner. Ultimately, Albanian MoD agreed to share some of the requested information after a hearing session was facilitated between representatives of the MoD and Balkan Defence Monitor's local partners and it delivered data solely on percentage of women in the defence sector and implementation of the UNSCR 1325. This is certainly a case of a setback, since Albania had provided majority of requested information for the previous editions of the Balkan Defence Monitor without the procedure involving the national Commissioner.

When it comes to financial information, transparency significantly fluctuates. Croatia is still the only country in the region whose budget includes specific procurement projects broken down into categories of costs, which is a good transparency practice that other countries should consider adopting. All countries publish defence budgets on their websites, with some of them also publishing public procurement plans and reports on implementation of the defence budget. These reports, published by North Macedonia and Serbia, present an example of good practice in transparency. All countries except Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina have delivered information on foreign donations, while some of the countries occasionally publish articles about these donations on their websites. Montenegro has been the most transparent in the region regarding its donations to Ukraine, with North Macedonia close behind. Croatia has kept these data classified, which contributed to the assessment of a setback in transparency.



Strategic documents are generally accessible on websites; however, the countries should ensure concordance between multiple language versions of their websites. Transparency could be further improved by a proper organisation of respective MoD websites or pages, as in the case of Montenegro. Croatia, Serbia and North Macedonia have the easiest access to relevant documents on their websites, while in the case of Montenegro they usually have to be accessed through search. All the countries except Serbia (and this year, Albania) have delivered or published statistical data on human resources and percentage of women in the defence sector. Croatia and Montenegro remain the most transparent in the segment of human resources thanks to their annual defence reports, which cover all relevant information from the defence sector. Other countries should consider introducing the practice of publishing such defence reports as well.

## FINANCIAL INFORMATION

### ALBANIA

Albanian defence budget is still the least transparent budget in the region, containing only seven general categories: Planning, Management and Administration, Combat Forces, Military Education, Combat Support, Health Support, Social Support and Civil Emergencies. These budget programmes are not disaggregated and the sum of planned expenditure on categories such as personnel or arms and equipment cannot be extracted from the budget. However, the Ministry of Defence does publish annual monitoring reports on the implementation of the budget,<sup>1</sup> which are more detailed and contain references to specific projects within the seven budget programmes, together with expenditure on mentioned projects. Since these reports are published retroactively, with the last one published in August 2023, the level of transparency regarding the current and upcoming budgets is still low.

Since the Ministry of Defence refused to respond to the FOI request of the research team which included a question regarding donations to the Ministry of Defence, there is no official information regarding donations received during the monitoring period. The MoD website also failed to provide more information on the matter, so the research team relied on open-source search. Albania has also reported sending financial and military aid to Ukraine, but the subject and value of the military donation are not disclosed.<sup>2</sup>

### BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The defence budget of Bosnia and Herzegovina is among the less transparent ones in the region. The higher level of disaggregation in the category of current expenses than in capital expenses could be attributed to the fact that majority of defence budget of BiH goes to personnel costs and that capital expenditure has consistently been the lowest in the region. The arms and equipment expenditure is shown as a lump sum and does not refer to specific projects, although several multi-year modernisation projects with execution by year are mentioned in other parts of the BiH budget.

The MoD's response to the FOI request provided no information on donations, despite the open-source research revealing donations from the EU and Germany in the reporting period. This indicates that the response received this year was less detailed when it comes to financial

1 Republic of Albania, Ministry of Defence, Monitoring Reports, <https://www.mod.gov.al/index.php/politikat-e-sigurise/te-tjera-nga-mm/raporte-monitorimi>

2 Republic of Albania, Ministry of Defence, "Minister of Defence at the 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Contact Group: Another package of donations for Ukraine," 20 January 2023, <https://www.mod.gov.al/newsroom-2/5890-ministri-i-mbrojtjes-ne-takimin-e-8-te-te-grupit-te-kontaktit-pakete-tjeter-donacionesh-per-ukrainen>

information compared to the responses received in the previous years. On a more positive note, the annual reports on execution of the MoD budget do contain more information on specific projects and donations. The last such report published on the MoD website is for 2022.<sup>3</sup>

## CROATIA

Despite still being the most transparent country in the region regarding defence expenditure, Croatia has recorded certain backsliding in transparency when it comes to procurement in 2023. For the first time in years, the 2023 Procurement plan of the Ministry of Defence included the classified “Book 2”. Journalists in Croatia have also criticised the absence of public presentation of the Procurement Plan, which was an established practice, as well as the fact that planned costs of maintenance of the Orbiter 3B unmanned aerial vehicle system exceed its initial price by nearly 4 times.<sup>4</sup>

The classification of Croatia’s defence budget is slightly altered since 2023 and includes a less detailed cost-breakdown, but still maintains a high level of transparency. It is the only defence budget in the region that includes specific procurement projects broken down into various categories of costs as specific budget activities (titled, for example, equipping with multirole combat aircraft). Donations are included in the budget as a lump sum and the MoD publishes news about donations on its website. Lastly, unlike some other NATO members including Montenegro, Croatia has kept its donations to Ukraine classified, eliciting questions about their impact on the equipment of Croatian Army.<sup>5</sup>

## MONTENEGRO

Montenegro is among the leaders in the region regarding defence expenditure transparency and has made improvements in disaggregation of the budget in 2023. The MoD budget now includes NATO, EU and UN missions as specific budget activities and outlines several categories of costs in each of them, such as personnel. The narrative part of the budget refers to planned procurement procedures, their estimated value and creditor (if there is one), but the capital expenditure on arms and equipment is still shown in the budget as a lump sum in several places, without references to specific procurement projects. While most of the subsections contain a detailed list of services, there are still considerable amounts classified under the item of “other services.”

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3 Izvješće o izvršenju proračuna Ministarstva obrane i oružanih snaga BiH za 2022. godinu, [Report on the execution of the budget of the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the year 2022], 24 February 2023, <https://www.mod.gov.ba/afoto2016/110723%20Izvjestaj%20o%20izvršenju%20budzeta%202022.pdf>

4 Obris – Obrana i sigurnost, “MORH objavio Plan nabave u 2023. – Javelini i Patrije, te povratak tajnosti,” [The MoD announced the Procurement Plan in 2023 – Javelins and Patrije, and the return of secrecy], 19 January 2023, <https://obris.org/hrvatska/morh-objavio-plan-nabave-u-2023-javelini-i-patrije-te-povratak-tajnosti/>

5 Obris – Obrana i sigurnost, “Ima li RH plan za kompenzaciju opreme donirane Ukrajini?” [Does the Republic of Croatia have a plan to compensate for the equipment donated to Ukraine?], 23 March 2023, <https://obris.org/svijet/ima-li-rh-plan-za-kompenzaciju-opreme-donirane-ukrajini/>

Regarding donations to the Army, Montenegro is highly transparent. All information, including the subject and the value of donation where applicable, can be obtained via FOI request. Information on donations can be also found on the Government's website – in 2023, articles were published on the donations from Turkey<sup>6</sup> and Slovenia.<sup>7</sup> The MoD also provides information on donations to Ukraine, which has been declassified.<sup>8</sup>

## NORTH MACEDONIA

The budget of the Ministry of Defence of North Macedonia can be described as disaggregated and transparent to a certain extent, however there is still room for improvement. Just like all other budgets except Croatian, the North Macedonian defence budget does not refer to specific procurement projects as budget items, but rather all the capital expenditure on equipment is qualified under "purchase of equipment and machinery."

All the documents related to budgets and procurements are published on the MoD website. It is a good MoD's practice to publish of quarterly expenditure reports which include major budget categories. The Ministry is responsive to FOI requests regarding donations, providing the approximate value of donations received from the USA and UK. Regarding donations to Ukraine, representatives of the Ministry share information on the subjects of the donations, such as the one from March when North Macedonia donated 12 MI-24 helicopters to Ukraine.<sup>9</sup>

## SERBIA

The Serbian defence budget is moderately transparent, with several programmes and projects that include only the item titled "machines and equipment" but without linking it to specific procurements. Article 5 of the Budget Law provides an overview of planned capital expenditure for the current and two following years, but the budget justification does not include more information on capital expenditure projects. The MoD regularly publishes relevant financial plans and documents on its website, such as the reports on budget execution or public procurement plans.

The Ministry provided information about the donations realised in 2023 in response to the FOI request. It used to publish information about donations on MOD or Army websites as well, but no such articles were found regarding donations in 2023. When it comes to donations from the US, subject and value of the donation were outlined. However, in the case of a donation from China, the response only stated that an agreement on the 6.7 million USD donation was signed in March 2023, but did not elaborate on the contents of the donation. No information on this agreement could be found on the websites of the MoD or the Army either.

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6 Vlada Crne Gore, "Turska donirala Vojsci Crne Gore tri logistička vozila: Ministar Adžić i ambasador Kalkavan obavili primopredaju," [Turkey donated three logistics vehicles to the Army of Montenegro: Minister Adžić and Ambassador Kalkavan performed the handover], 25 September 2023, <https://www.gov.me/clanak/turska-donirala-vojsci-crne-gore-tri-logisticka-vozila-ministar-adzic-i-ambasador-kalkavan-obavili-primopredaju>

7 Vlada Crne Gore, "Slovenačka donacija: U kasarni "Milovan Šaranović" obavljena primopredaja sedam brdskih topova za Počasnu gardu," [Slovenian donation: In the "Milovan Šaranović" barracks, seven mountain guns were handed over to the Honor Guard], 30 October 2023, <https://www.gov.me/clanak/slovenačka-donacija-u-kasarni-milovan-saranovic-obavljena-primopredaja-sedam-brdskih-topova-za-pocasnu-gardu>

8 Vijesti, "Crna Gora poslala Ukrajini oružje i opremu vrijednu oko 10 miliona eura," [Montenegro sent weapons and equipment worth about 10 million euros to Ukraine], 10 February 2023, <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/drustvo/642740/crna-gora-poslala-ukrajini-oruzje-i-opremu-vrijednu-oko-10-miliona-eura?>

9 Radio Slobodna Evropa, "Makedonska Vlada odlučila donirati stare helikoptere Ukrajini," [The Macedonian government decided to donate old helicopters to Ukraine], 29 March 2023, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/sjeverna-makedonija-ukrajina-donacija-helikopteri/32340887.html>

## STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS

All the countries demonstrate a sufficient level of transparency when it comes to publication of strategic documents. Having in mind that no changes were recorded in 2023 in the field of strategic planning in the region, the assessment of transparency has not changed either. Defence strategies and national security strategies are published on the respective websites of the Ministries of Defence, or in case of Montenegro, on the Government website. However, it is important that Ministries ensure concordance of published documents in different languages, especially in cases where there is more than one official language. The English versions of the websites should also be better organised in terms of documents, so that they provide access to all relevant existing documents at least in the original language. North Macedonia and Serbia have the most structured and well-organised websites when it comes to publication of strategic documents in both native language and English. The Croatian MoD has a much more elaborated website in Croatian than in English, while the websites of the Ministries of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina fail to publish some of the strategic documents in English. The English version of the Montenegrin website is least detailed, as it is also a part of the Government's website and not a specific MoD website. While Montenegro is quite transparent in publishing relevant information in all areas, considering the creation of a specific webpage of the Ministry of Defence with clearly displayed sections on strategic documents could facilitate access to information.

All the countries except Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia have published long-term development plans. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the document titled "Long-Term Modernisation Plan of the Armed Forces of BiH 2017-2027" is often referred to in other relevant documents of the Ministry but cannot be found on the website. Serbia still has not adopted its long-term plan for the development of the defence system, and in the response to the FOI request the MoD explained that the document would be drafted after the ongoing drafting process of the Defence Strategic Review is wrapped up. Bosnia and Herzegovina remains the only country in the region to have its Military Doctrine publicly available. Serbian military doctrine, adopted in 2010, used to be publicly available, but that is not the case anymore as the document has been classified under the level of "internal" under the Data Secrecy Law.<sup>10</sup>

## HUMAN RESOURCES

Croatia and Montenegro are the most transparent in this area, thanks to their annual defence reports which include several categories of data on human resources, such as personnel attrition. Croatia is the only country which has published the number of the army personnel (disaggregated by gender and ranks) on its website, but the data have not been updated since 2020. Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Montenegro have provided this data in response to the FOI requests. Since Albania denied responding to this part of the FOI request and the website of the Albanian Armed Forces is not accessible, unlike in the previous editions of the Balkan Defence Monitor, no data on the state of human resources could be obtained in this case.

Serbia, on the other hand, has classified most of the documents related to human resources management with the level of secrecy "confidential" or higher. This was enabled by the 2016 *Decision on Determining the Degree of Secrecy of Data in the Ministry of Defence and the Armed*

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<sup>10</sup> Response of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Serbia to the freedom of information request submitted by the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, 10 February 2022

Forces<sup>11</sup> which was criticised by civil society for reducing transparency of the defence sector. Therefore, the total number of personnel in the Serbian Army remains unavailable to the public. The only number related to human resources that has been communicated to the public in the past year is related to the plan to drastically increase the unit strength of special Army units up to 5000.<sup>12</sup> The plan, presented by President Aleksandar Vučić, has received a lot attention and the selection process for special units is ongoing.

## GENDER

The data on percentage of women in the Army and MOD have been published (in annual defence reports in the case of Croatia) or provided upon request (by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia). These countries have disclosed data disaggregated by military ranks, allowing conclusions to be drawn on the participation and advancement of women in the defence sector.

When it comes to implementation of the UNSC Resolution 1325 – Women, Peace and Security, Montenegro and North Macedonia have published active NAPs on their respective websites. Montenegro has also created a specific page on the MoD's subsection of the Government website dedicated to women in the defence sector and has published a brochure on the implementation of main UNSCR 1325 goals, contributing to the improvement of transparency in this segment.<sup>13</sup> Thereby it has joined North Macedonia as the only other country in the region to have a website section dedicated to women in the defence sector, which is a practice all other Ministries could embrace in order to improve transparency.

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11 Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Serbia, "Odluka o određivanju stepena tajnosti podataka u Ministarstvu odbrane i Vojsci Srbije," [Decision on determining the degree of secrecy of data in the Ministry of Defence and Serbian Armed Forces], 8 March 2016, [https://www.mod.gov.rs/multimedia/file/staticki\\_sadrzaj/slu%C5%BEbeni%20vojni%20list/2016/SVL%20broj%2005.pdf](https://www.mod.gov.rs/multimedia/file/staticki_sadrzaj/slu%C5%BEbeni%20vojni%20list/2016/SVL%20broj%2005.pdf)

12 Balkanska bezbednosna mreža, "Srbija pravi hibridni model snaga za brzo reagovanje," [Serbia is creating a hybrid model of rapid reaction forces], 24 February 2023, <https://www.balkansec.net/post/srbija-pravi-hibridni-model-snaga-za-brzo-reagovanje>

13 Vlada Crne Gore, "Brošura Primjena rezolucije Savjeta bezbjednosti Ujedinjenih nacija 1325 – Žene, mir i bezbjednost i njoj pratećih rezolucija u Crnoj Gori, [Brochure Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 – Women, peace and security and its following resolutions in Montenegro], 1 February 2024, <https://www.gov.me/clanak/brosura-primjena-rezolucije-savjeta-bezbjednosti-ujedinjenih-nacija-1325-zene-mir-i-bezbjednost-i-njoj-pratecih-rezolucija-u-crnoj-gori>



**Balkan** 2024  
**Defence  
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**Defence  
expenditure**



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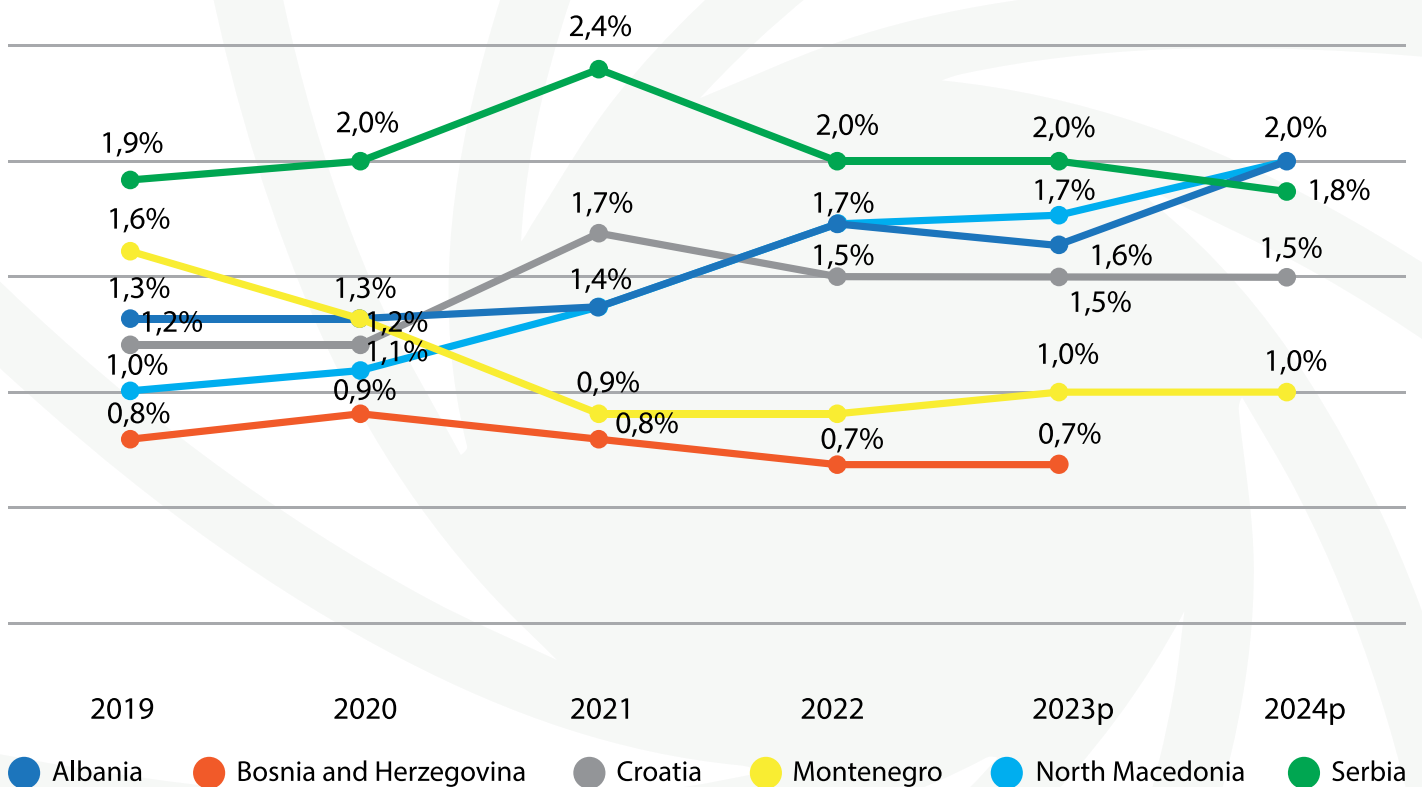
# DEFENCE EXPENDITURE

## REGIONAL OVERVIEW



Among the Balkan countries, Serbia still has the highest defence spending as the share of GDP (2,0%). None of the NATO member states in the region has reached the 2% GDP defence spending threshold in 2023. Although Albania and North Macedonia initially planned the budget for 2023 to reach the 2% GDP threshold, the actual expenditure in both countries appears to be below 2% of their GDP. Bosnia and Herzegovina has the lowest military expenditure in the region, maintaining it below 1% of GDP.

Defence expenditure (% GDP)



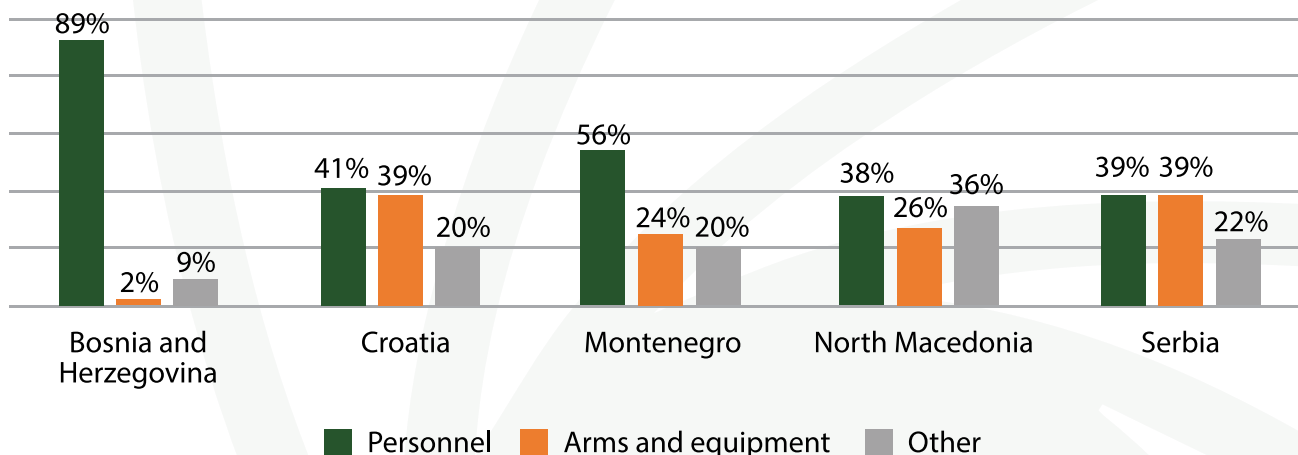
*\*Data for 2023 is based on the last changes in the 2023 budgets (due to the fact that the countries have not yet adopted balance sheets for 2023). Data for 2024 is based on the initial budget laws for 2024 and IMF projection of GDP.*

All the countries in the Balkans publish their defence expenditure as part of government budgets and balance sheets. However, different countries use different methods to present their defence expenditure, usually providing only the aggregated sums of larger categories and thus making it difficult to isolate and scrutinize 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.

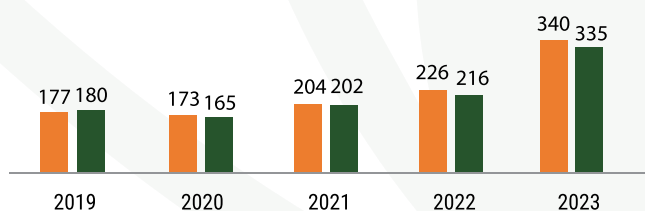
1 The research team used publicly available data on defence expenditure (MoDs expenditure) that were included in the government expenditure documents. Defence expenditure was extracted from balance sheets (i.e. actual spending) wherever possible, while the most recent Budget Law amendments were taken into account for the year 2023. Data for 2024 are plans, based on initial budget laws. Letter p is used to mark plans in the graphs. Information on GDP in selected countries was taken from the database of the International Monetary Fund.

The comparison below is based on the balance sheets from 2022, because most of the Balkan countries have not yet adopted their balance sheets for 2023. As in the previous years, Bosnia and Herzegovina's expenditure on personnel is the largest, while Croatia and North Macedonia significantly decreased the percentage of defence budget spent on personnel comparing to the year 2020. Albania was excluded from this comparison because of methodological reasons (explanation can be found in the chapter on defence expenditure of Albania).

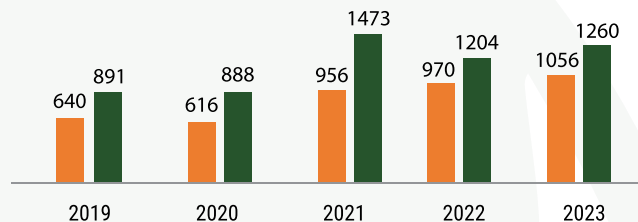
## Spending on personnel and equipment in 2022 (% of defence expenditure)<sup>2</sup>



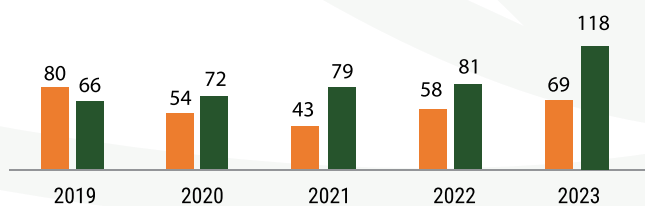
### Albania



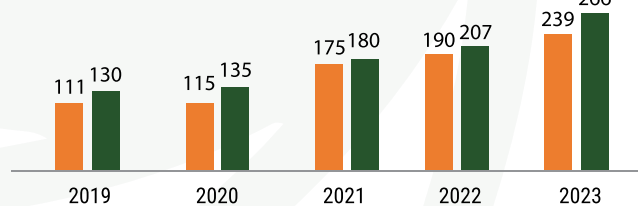
### Croatia



### Montenegro



### North Macedonia



■ NATO database     ■ Government balance sheets  
 (million EUR)

*Defence spending is presented in current EUR, calculated based on the exchange rate of the national currencies at the end of the given year.*

Apart from Albania, defence expenditure of Western Balkan NATO members reported to the Alliance differs to a great extent from the government balance sheets. The differences are predominantly present due to the NATO expenditure methodology that includes military pensions, which are not part of the funds for Ministries of Defence in national budgets. The largest discrepancy between Ministry of Defence budget and the budget reported to NATO appears in the case of Montenegro.

<sup>2</sup> 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.



Despite the notable growth in Albanian defence expenditure over the last five years, the expenditure remains below the NATO commitment of 2% of GDP for defence spending. Nevertheless, the planned budget for 2024 indicates a substantial increase compared to 2023, suggesting that the NATO goal should be reached in 2024. The defence expenditure's share in Albania's total government expenditure is continuously increasing. Based on the latest Budget Law amendments from 2023, it is planned to reach **9.18% of total government expenditure**.

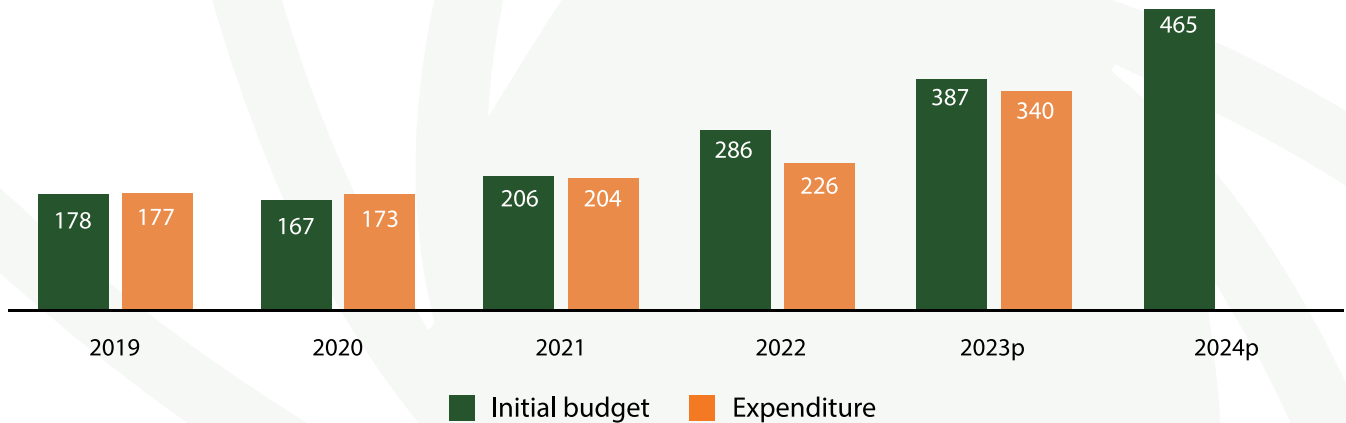
## 2023

Share of GDP **1.63%**

Share of total government expenditure **9.18%**

The balance sheet for the year 2022 (adopted in May 2023) indicates a significant deviation from the initial budget, a variance not observed in the preceding years. The budget is usually underspent, which is a trend that appears to persist in 2023.

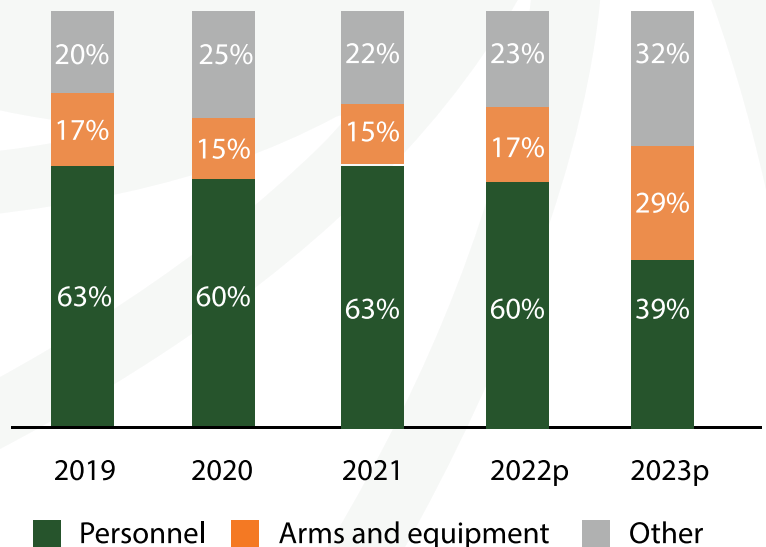
Initial budgets and defence expenditure (in million EUR)



The defence budget structure is not evident from Albanian official documents that are publicly available, which is why the NATO database was used for this purpose. Personnel spending has significantly decreased in 2023, while the increase in arms and equipment spending is considerable.

During 2022 the salaries of the Albanian armed forces were increased by 30%. The increase will continue in 2023 by 7% for all ranks, which explains the decrease in spending on personnel compared to 2022. In the beginning of 2023, Albanian Minister of Defence announced procurement of the unmanned combat aerial vehicles – TB2 armed drones, from the Turkish company “Baykar Technologies”, as well as building of the cyber field operational centre.<sup>2</sup>

Budget structure<sup>1</sup>



1 Albanian budget structure graph is designed with the 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.

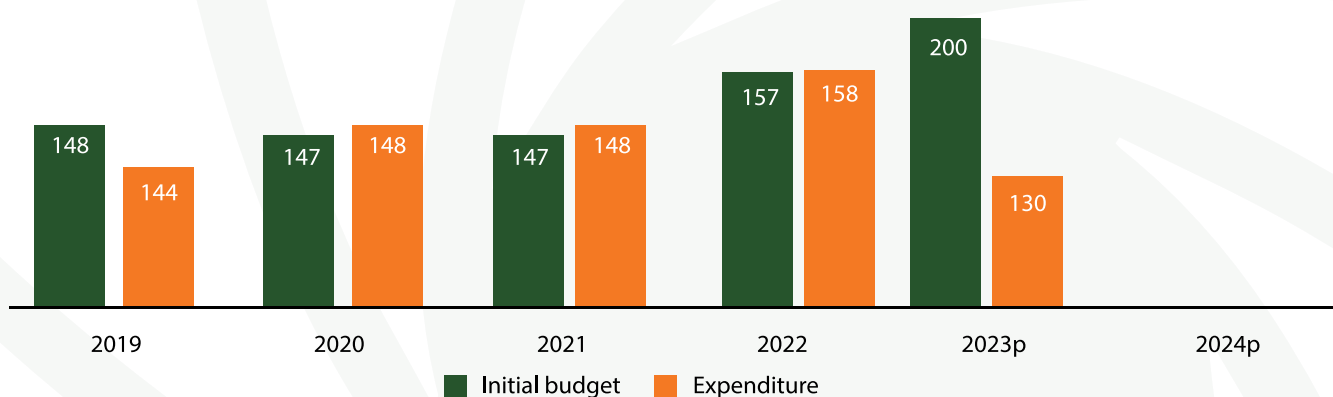
2 Republic of Albania, Ministry of Defence, “2022 achievements and 2023 goals, Peleshi: Strengthen cybersecurity, increase military salaries”, 8 January 2023, <https://www.mod.gov.al/newsroom-2/5870-arritjet-e-2022-dhe-objektivat-e-2023-peleshi-fuqizojme-sigurine-kibernetike-rrisim-pagat-e-ushtarakeve>

Although military expenditure of Bosnia and Herzegovina has increased comparing to previous years, it remains the lowest in the region – below 1% of GDP. <sup>1</sup>

**2022**  
Share of GDP **0.69%**

Based on the federal budget for 2023 (adopted in April 2023), the initial defence budget is increased by approximately 27%. However, the balance sheet for 2023 has not been adopted yet, but only the report on actual expenditure from January 1, 2023, until September 30, 2023. Based on that information, the military spending of Bosnia and Herzegovina does not seem to be significantly increased in 2023 either. The 2024 budget has not been adopted yet.

Initial budgets and defence expenditure (in million EUR)



Traditionally, Bosnia and Herzegovina allocates the majority of its defence budget on personnel costs. The MoD has the largest number of employees among state institutions in the country and the highest share in the total amount of gross salaries. Still, the biggest turnover of personnel is evident at the MoD because of the implementation of provisions of the Law on the Armed Forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina related to the prescribed age limit. Namely, the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina were in a transitional period starting from 2010 when the majority of military personnel were discharged from the Armed Forces due to age limit. The transition continued in the following years, which involves the dismissal of one generation of military personnel who reached the prescribed age limit and the admission of a new generation.<sup>2</sup> For instances, until the end of September 2023, the total of 501 employees were discharged from the MoD, while 225 new employees were hired.<sup>3</sup> The dynamics of hiring new military personnel significantly impacts the expenditure on personnel.

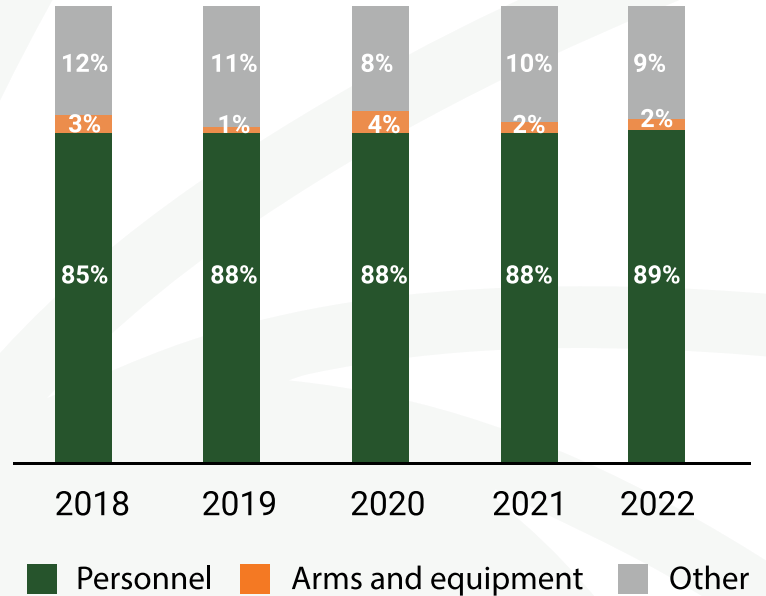
1 Due to the complexity of the budget system, it is methodologically challenging to calculate the military expenditure of BiH as a share of the total government expenditure, comparable to other countries in the region. Namely, two entities have independent budgets that, then, allocate funds upward to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

2 Ministarstvo finansija i trezora BiH, "Izveštaj o izvršenju budžeta institucija Bosne i Hercegovine i međunarodnih obaveza Bosne i Hercegovine za 2022. godinu," [Report on the execution of the budget of the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the international obligations of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the year 2022] April 2023 <https://www.mft.gov.ba/Content/OpenAttachment?id=538fd6f1-b65d-41e3-8f8e-7037868ca98e&lang=bs>

3 Ministarstvo finansija i trezora BiH, "Izveštaj o izvršenju budžeta institucija Bosne i Hercegovine i međunarodnih obaveza Bosne i Hercegovine za period I – IX 2023. godine [Report on the execution of the budget of the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the international obligations of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period I – IX 2023] November 2023, <https://www.mft.gov.ba/Content/OpenAttachment?id=bc7ccedd-d913-4527-a21f-441445b73240&lang=bs>

Arms and equipment expenses are documented in the budget and balance sheets under the aggregated category Equipment procurement, without providing further details on types of procurement. The MoD initiated multi-year projects which include overhaul of helicopters (for instance, repairs and overhaul of Gazelle helicopters or procurement of spare parts for UH-1H helicopters) and purchase of specialized motor vehicles. However, additional funds for these projects were not provided in 2023.

## Budget structure



Military budget of Croatia has almost doubled since 2017, largely due to the procurement of 12 French Dassault Rafale fighter jets in 2021. Projections for 2024 and 2025 suggest steady further increase, partly attributed to procurements of Bradley armoured vehicles and Black Hawk helicopters from the USA. Defence expenditure as a percentage of total government expenditure ranges around 3.5 percent, albeit it surpassed 4 percent in 2021 and 2022.

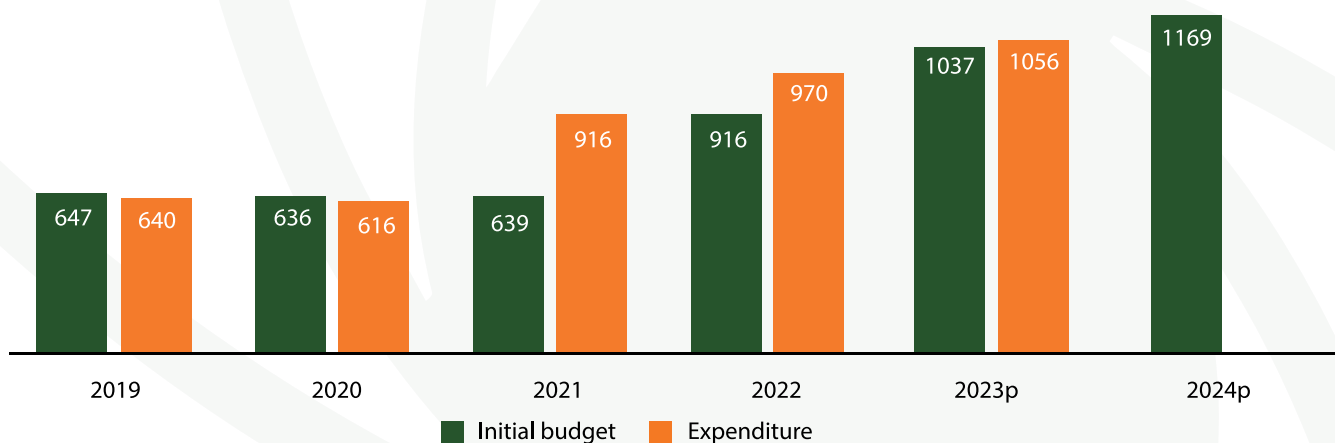
## 2023

Share of GDP **1.45%**

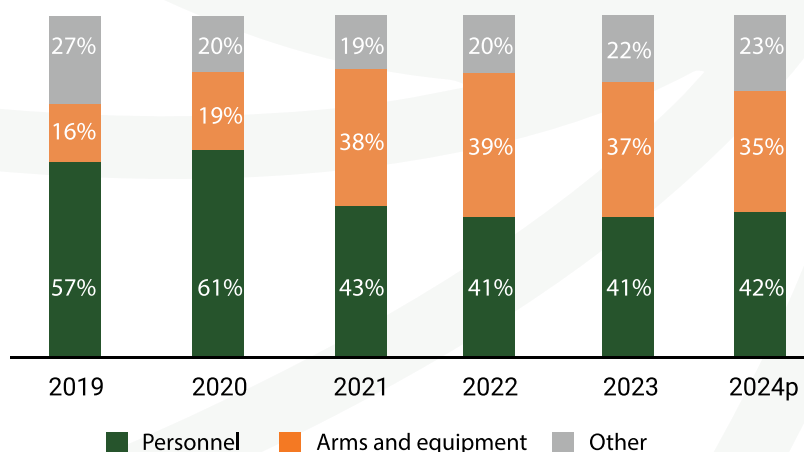
Share of total government expenditure **3.60%**

The Parliament regularly adopts budgets for the upcoming year, usually in November. Balance sheets and yearly Reports on defence are also regularly adopted by the Parliament, however the last one adopted was the Report for 2021, while the Report for 2022 is still in procedure, being submitted by the Government later than usual.

Initial budgets and defence expenditure (in million EUR)



Budget structure



In 2021 there was a shift in defence budget structure in favour of arms and equipment, attributed to the Rafale purchase which still takes the largest portion of capital expenditure. Modernisation of the army foresees several other purchases from the US, such as Patria armoured vehicles and Javelin anti-tank guided missile system, confirming this trend. Since 2021, spending on personnel ranges around 42 percent. Despite changes in budget display since 2023, making the budget slightly less disaggregated and transparent, Croatian defence budget is at the top in the region when it comes to these categories. It shows to specific procurements broken down into subcategories.

Defence budget of Montenegro has undergone fluctuations in the past years, both in terms of absolute increase and budget structure. This is partly a consequence of the country joining NATO and modernizing the Army to meet the NATO standards, but also due to political crisis and changes of governments.<sup>1</sup> Data for 2023 suggests a stabilization of defence expenditure compared to initial budget.

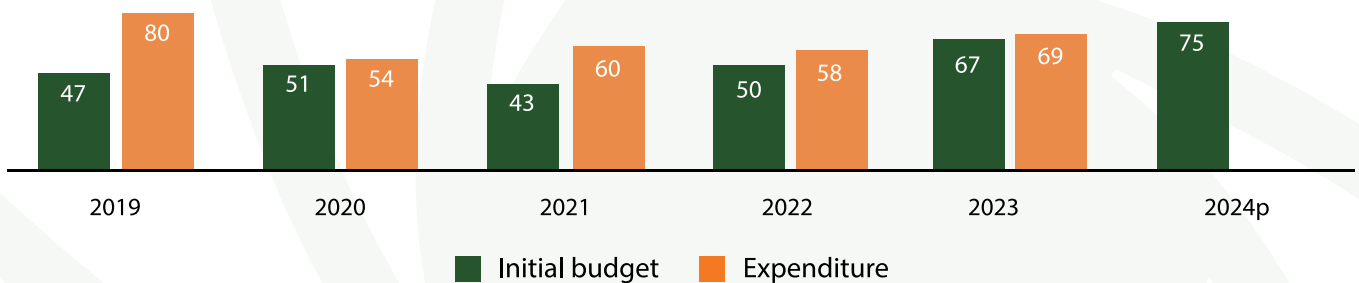
## 2023

Share of GDP **1.08%**

Share of total government expenditure **2.63%**

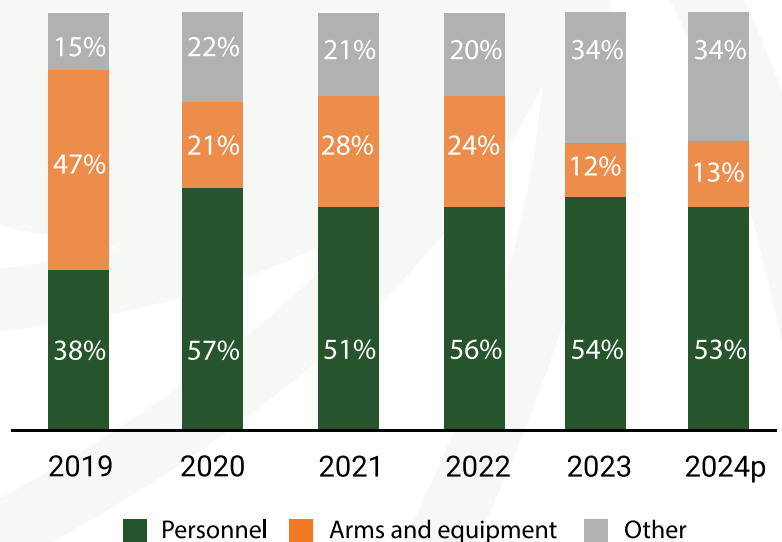
Budgets for the upcoming year are usually adopted by the Parliament in November or December, albeit the 2021 Budget was adopted with a six-month delay. Balance sheets submitted by the Government have never been adopted by the Parliament, with the 2021 Balance sheet failing to pass the competent parliamentary Board and 2022 Balance sheet still being in procedure.

Initial budgets and defence expenditure (in million EUR)



With the exception of 2018 and 2019, more than half of defence expenditure goes on personnel. Larger percentage of spending on arms and equipment in those two years is due to procurement of Bell helicopters and Oshkosh JLTV armoured vehicles. Except for 2023, expenditure structure greatly differs from initial budget structure – in 2022, 7.6 percent was planned for arms and equipment, but the balance sheet shows almost 24 percent of budget being spent. This gap was even larger in 2021. Upcoming procurements include 120mm vehicle-mounted mortar system from Israel worth 20 million USD. Montenegrin budget is among the most transparent in the region and has improved in 2023 by including NATO, EU and UN missions as specific budget activities. Transparency and disaggregation could be further improved, including by referring to specific procurements.

Budget structure



<sup>1</sup> In 2020 election, the Democratic Party of Socialist, which governed Montenegro for 30 years, lost the elections. The succeeding government lasted only until 2022, when it lost the Parliament's confidence, followed by another short-lived government which spend most of its governing in a technical mandate. The institutional deadlock caused by the controversial changes to the Law on the president and a non-functional Constitutional court soon followed. The incumbent government led by the movement "Europe now" was formed in October 2023, after the June 2023 parliamentary elections.

# North Macedonia

Defence budget of North Macedonia has experienced a substantial increase since the country joined NATO in 2020. The increase is also a consequence of a long-term plan of modernisation of the Army. Despite the budget being underspent in the last two years, the 2024 budget comes with a 38% increase compared to the previous year. Defence expenditure as a share of GDP also increased from 1% in 2019 to over 2% planned in 2024.

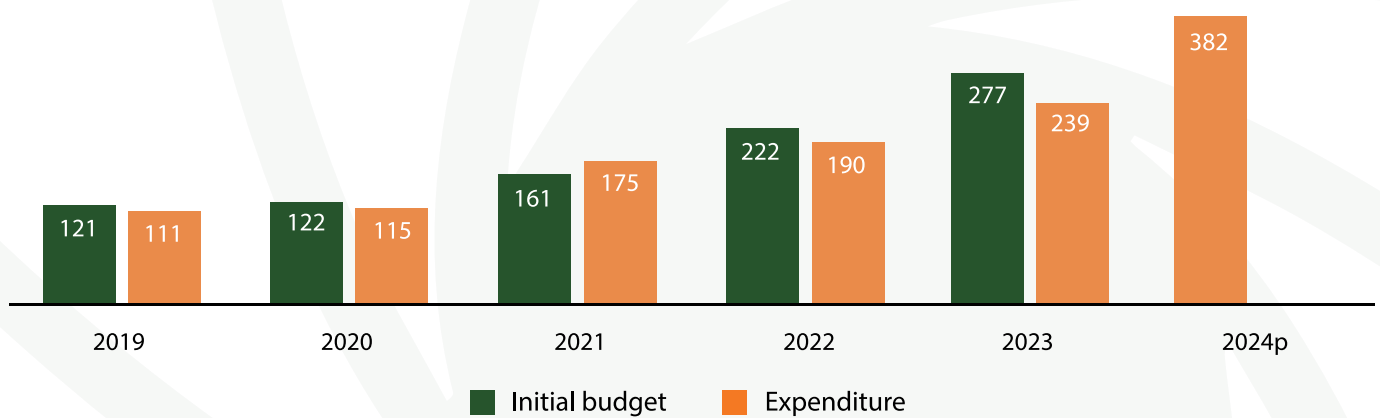
## 2023

Share of GDP **1.67%**

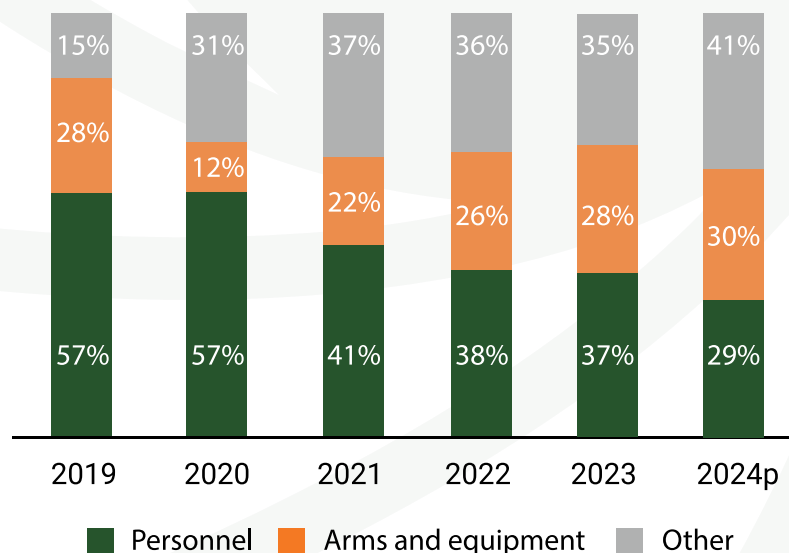
Share of total government expenditure **4.52%**

Budget laws for the upcoming year are regularly adopted by the Parliament of North Macedonia in late December. Balance sheets are usually adopted regularly as well. The Ministry of Defence publishes quartal budget realisation reports on its website.

Initial budgets and defence expenditure (in million EUR)



Budget structure



Until 2021, the largest percentage of the budget was spent on personnel. Following modernisation projects and equipment procurement, such as Stryker and Oshkosh armed vehicles, the share of arms and equipment budget started to slowly increase. By the 2023 budget, North Macedonia planned to spend 39% on this category, however it actually spent 11% less, or 28% of defence expenditure. In 2024 arms and equipment spending is expected to surpass personnel expenditure.

The large portion of other expenses accounts for goods and services excluding capital expenditure, and transfers to pension fund and local municipalities. The defence budget of North Macedonia is divided into programmes and its transparency and disaggregation could be improved.

The observed trend of rise in Serbian defence expenditure since 2016 halted in 2022, with expenditures falling below the figures recorded in 2021. As the balance sheet for 2023 has not been adopted yet, the actual military expenditure for the year remains unavailable. Nevertheless, based on the most recent amendments to the Budget Law, it is anticipated that military spending in 2023 will be on the rise again, constituting an 8.05% share of the total expenditure.

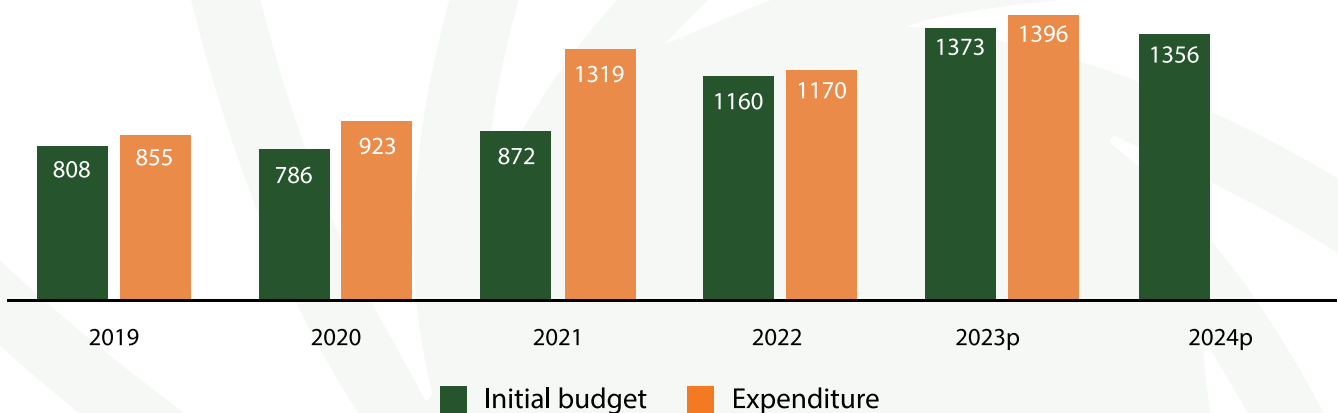
## 2023

Share of GDP **2.05%**

Share of total government expenditure **8.05%**

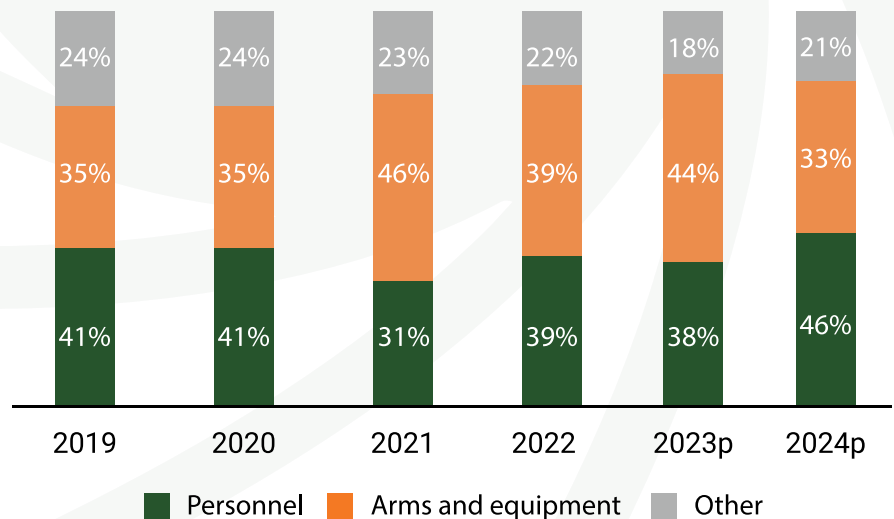
The National Assembly usually adopts the budget for the forthcoming year in early December. The planned budget for 2024 is decreased by almost 1.3% comparing to 2023.

Initial budgets and defence expenditure (in million EUR)



Serbian budget is broken down into programmes, presenting budget funds for specific areas as well as different sources of funds. Despite that, the budget is not sufficiently disaggregated and detailed, which prevents comprehensive oversight. For instance, arms and equipment costs are not disaggregated by concrete projects, and it is thus impossible to connect them to individual procurement projects. Within the programme “Functioning of the MoD and the Serbian Army” the largest part of the

Budget structure



budget is spent on the purchase of arms and equipment, without specifying which arms and which equipment. It should also be noted that the operating costs, including costs of maintenance, spare parts, fuel, and everything that is needed for training, exercise, and general building capabilities, are relatively low compared to the amount spent on purchase of arms and equipment. The information about the procurements can usually be found in MoD’s announcements, such as the announcement about procurement and modernization of 92 complex combat platforms for the needs of the Serbian Armed Forces, but even in those sources of information further details cannot be found.

1. Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije, “Potpisani ugovori za nabavku i modernizaciju složenih borbenih platformi u vrednosti od oko 13,5 milijardi dinara,” [Contracts signed for the procurement and modernization of complex combat platforms in the value of about 13.5 billion dinars], 28 September 2023, <https://www.mod.gov.rs/lat/20524/potpisani-ugovori-za-nabavku-i-modernizaciju-slozenih-borbenih-platformi-u-vrednosti-od-oko-13-5-milijardi-dinara20524>



**Balkan** 2024  
**Defence  
Monitor**

# International Military Cooperation



**BCSP**  
Belgrade Centre  
for Security Policy



# INTERNATIONAL MILITARY COOPERATION



## REGIONAL OVERVIEW

**In 2023, even for non-NATO members like Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, NATO dominated as a partner of Western Balkan countries regarding international military cooperation. Even Serbia, a country which proclaimed military neutrality and conducts a foreign policy of balancing between great powers, has the most dynamic security cooperation with NATO and the US. Multilateral military exercises are either openly NATO exercises or exercises led by individual NATO powers like the US and France to foster interoperability, operations and procedures according to NATO standards. Regarding bilateral military exercises, the key NATO powers like the US, the UK, France and Turkey dominate.**

What is noticeable is the sharp increase in the number of exercises compared to 2022 in some countries. Compared to 2022, when Montenegro participated in 17 military exercises, in 2023 Montenegro took part in 25 international exercises. In 2022, North Macedonia held 20 international military exercises, while in 2023, the number of international military exercises conducted by the North Macedonian military jumped to 31. Croatian armed forces appear to have an even more impressive leap in the number of exercises they conduct. By compiling data from the Croatian MoD website and the plan of military exercises that the Croatian government adopted in early 2023, the number of exercises the Croatian military took part in soared from 14 in 2022 to 66 in 2023.<sup>1</sup> These exercises were quite diverse if one looks at them individually, involving regular troops, special forces, the navy, air force, military police, cyber defence and computer-assisted exercises.

These data show several new realities. The first one is that the increased number of exercises is probably the product of growing security competition between NATO and Russia in Europe and the desire of the Alliance to enhance its readiness. The second one is that, within their foreign and security policies, the Western Balkan countries want to promote themselves as loyal and cooperative members of NATO. Ultimately, Western Balkan governments have an evident desire to increase their combat readiness through international military exercises.

Although Serbia is not a member of NATO, making its foreign and defence policy an outlier compared to the rest of the Western Balkans is also an interesting case showing that NATO and the US stand out as security partners. Namely, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Serbia banned all international military exercises. However, in 2023, the Serbian government also introduced an exemption from this ban applied to a single military exercise that Serbia participated in during 2023, the "Platinum Wolf 2023", co-organised by United States European Command and Serbian Armed Forces and hosted by Serbia. The participants of these exercises, besides the US and Serbia, were North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Slovenia and the UK.<sup>2</sup> The fact that the only military exercise exempted from the ban was the one with the US shows that the incumbent government in Serbia still desires to have a functional security relationship with the US. Not a military exercise, there was also another example of Serbo-American military cooperation in which the US European Command (EUCOM) was involved in exchanging experiences in combat search and rescue missions with the Serbian Air Force and Air Defence.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Obrisa – Obrana i sigurnost, "Vlada usvojila Plan vježbi za 2023." [The Government Adopted Plan of Exercises for 2023], 3 February 2023, <https://obrisa.org/hrvatska/vlada-usvojila-plan-vjezbi-za-2023/>

<sup>2</sup> Response of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Serbia to the freedom of information request submitted by the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, received 9 January 2024

<sup>3</sup> The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Serbia, Exchange of experiences in search and rescue missions, 8 August 2023, <https://www.mod.gov.rs/eng/20356/razmena-iskustava-u-oblasti-traganja-i-spasavanja20356>

There have also been regional multilateral exercises, like the special forces exercise the “Strong Balkan 23 (B-9)” hosted by Albania and intended to boost interoperability with NATO. The other regional groups under whose auspices exercise have been held are the Balkan Medical Task Force (BMTF), the Adriatic Charter (A-5), the South-Eastern Europe Brigade (SEEBRIG) and the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (ADRION).

The data on international military donations are less comprehensive and do not always provide a systemic overview. Albanian MoD refused to provide data on its international military cooperation, so the research focused on public sources. The regional overview is that the US and the EU were the dominant military donors for the Western Balkan countries, while in case of Serbia it was China, and in case of Montenegro, Turkey. The data provided by North Macedonian MoD only contained the approximate value of 2023 donations. Even in those cases, the exact timeframe was not clearly defined. The US military donations were approximately USD 3.718.792, involving spare parts for armoured vehicles and measurement instruments, and the donations from the UK were approximately GBP 100.000.

Nevertheless, based on the available data, the EU, through its European Peace Facility (EPF), was the largest donor to North Macedonia by providing EUR 9 million intended for the equipment of the light infantry battalion group to enhance the ability to participate in EU military missions under the auspices of EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy.<sup>4</sup> The open-source search established that the US was the largest military donor to Albania in 2023 with total value of donation USD 9.74 million.<sup>5</sup> As the MoD of Bosnia and Herzegovina did not provide data on donations, open-source research established that in 2023, the EU was the largest military donor for the country through various assistance measures estimated to have a total worth of EUR 26 million. Montenegro’s largest single military donor in 2023 appears to be Turkey, which donated three logistic vehicles worth USD 1.2 million.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of Croatia, the US appears to be the traditionally dominant international donor. In March 2023, Croatia signed a grant agreement with the US based on the foreign military assistance programme worth USD 140 million (EUR 152 million). Croatia announced it would use this grant to buy Blackhawk helicopters from the US.<sup>7</sup> As part of an effort to acquire 89 infantry fighting vehicles, Bradley from the US, Croatia agreed to provide USD 145,2 million, and the US will provide USD 57 million for this transaction.<sup>8</sup> Croatia also received a donation from the US of three Rigid Inflatable Boats (RIBs) for the Croatian special forces worth USD 5.1 million.<sup>9</sup> These donations and grants would put the total value of US donations to Croatia at USD 202.1 million.

Minor and major changes have occurred regarding participation in international military missions. In NATO’s enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Latvia, North Macedonia replaced the chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defence team (CBRN defence team) with an artillery unit. Compared to 2022, when North Macedonia had three soldiers in NATO Mission Iraq (NMI), there are no records of these soldiers in the data provided by the MoD nor in open sources suggesting that the participation in this mission is over. North Macedonia dispatched one liaison officer to Germany for NATO’s International Donor Coordination Centre and Security Assistance Group Ukraine (SAGU). There appear to be no major changes regarding Montenegro’s participation in multilateral peace missions compared to 2022.

No members of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina participated in peace missions in 2022 because of the political deadlock in the national institutions; the rotation of contingents of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in peace missions was suspended. However, the new Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2022 decided to continue the participation in international peace missions, which the country participated in in 2021. Bosnia and Herzegovina has two members of its armed forces in the UN mission MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo

and three in the EUTM mission in the Central African Republic.

Albanian MoD did not provide data on the number of Albanian troops in international peace missions, which is why research relied on open sources. In those cases where it was not possible to determine the exact number of troops, it was presumed that the number was the same as in 2022. While in 2022, the data on the Albanian participation in the KFOR mission in Kosovo showed discrepancy as the Albanian sources were showing 25 soldiers and the KFOR website 61; in 2023, the KFOR website indicated the presence of 90 Albanian troops in KFOR, showing an evident rise. Regarding NATO missions, within NATO's enhanced Vigilance Activities (eVA) in Bulgaria, Albania dispatched an infantry platoon and two members of its armed forces to NATO Mission Iraq (NMI). Regarding the UN missions, Albania increased its participation in the UNMISS mission in South Sudan from two to three soldiers, and dispatched one expert to UNISFA, a UN mission in Abeyi territory disputed between South Sudan and the Republic of Sudan.

Croatia experienced a major change in the number of participants in international missions. In NATO's enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group Poland (eFPBG-POL), Croatia had four members of its armed forces' members, but now it has 72. Croatia also added new missions to the list as it sent troops to two NATO battle groups: NATO's enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group Lithuania (eFPBG-LTU), where it has 178 armed forces' members, NATO's Enhanced Vigilance Activity Battle Group Hungary (eVA BG-HUN) where it dispatched 66 armed forces' members. In NATO Mission Iraq (NMI), Croatian participation almost doubled from 7 participants in 2022 to 13 in 2023. In the US-led "Inherent Resolve" mission stationed in Iraq to combat the Islamic State (IS), Croatia had two representatives, unlike in 2022, when it only had one.

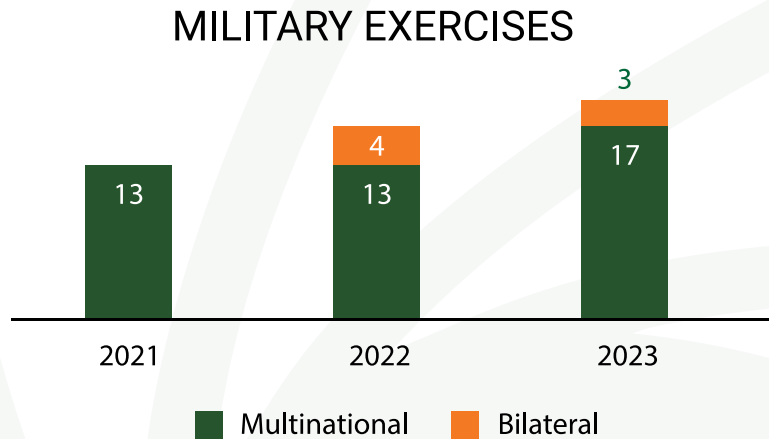
Serbia experienced an interesting change. The biggest change was the fact that Serbia dispatched ten soldiers to a US-led mission in Sinai, Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) charged with overseeing the 1978 Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel. Namely, since Serbia declared its military neutrality, it has pursued a practice of only dispatching soldiers to peace missions under the auspices of the UN or the EU. However, in Sinai, Serbian soldiers will be in MFO Sinai with their US counterparts. This mission, alongside the Serbian participation in the "Platinum Wolf 2023" exercise, speaks of Belgrade's partial pivot towards Washington in security and defence policy.<sup>10</sup>

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10 Igor Mirosavljević, "Through military exercise with NATO members, Serbia leans towards cooperation with the West," 27 March 2023, European Western Balkans (EWB), <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2023/04/27/through-military-exercise-with-nato-members-serbia-leans-towards-cooperation-with-the-west/>

## MILITARY EXERCISES

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Based on open-source data, Albania is estimated to have participated in 20 military events in 2023. There were 17 multilateral exercises. Most of these exercises were with NATO, ten total. There were three US-led multilateral exercises. There were four regional multilateral exercises: one with the Adriatic Charter (A-5) and two with the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (ADRION). The most important of these regional exercises was the special operation forces' exercise hosted by Albania, "Strong Balkan 23 (B-9)"; an exercise intended to boost interoperability with NATO. In total, Albania participated in three bilateral military drills in 2023. Two bilateral military drills were conducted with the US and one with the New Jersey Army National Guard. One bilateral military drill was done with Turkey.

## DONATIONS

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As the Albanian MoD refused to respond to the request for access to information, open-source research was conducted. Based on open sources, the US was the largest military donor to Albania in 2023 with USD 9.74 million.

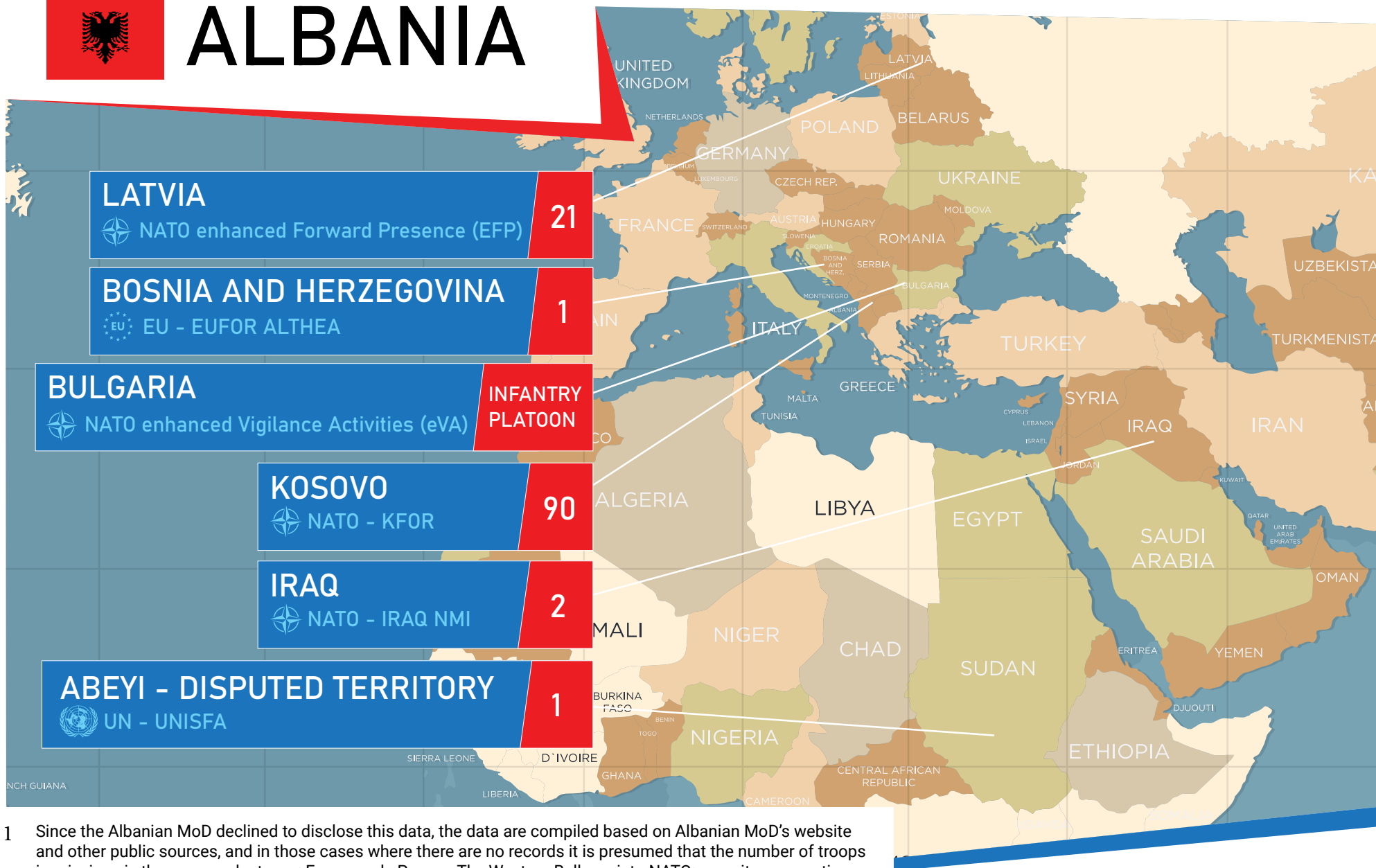
### TOP FOREIGN DONORS 2023

United States of America

USD 9.74 million



## ALBANIA



<sup>1</sup> Since the Albanian MoD declined to disclose this data, the data are compiled based on Albanian MoD's website and other public sources, and in those cases where there are no records it is presumed that the number of troops in missions is the same as last year; Emmanuele Panero, The Western Balkans into NATO: security perspectives, Brief n. 12/ December 2023, Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale (CESPI), p.5, <https://www.cespi.it/en/eventi-attualita/focus-balcani/western-balkans-nato-security-perspectives>; Two Albanian army officers to join NATO mission in Iraq, 29 March 2023, Albanian Telegraphic Agency, <https://en.ata.gov.al/2023/03/29/two-albanian-army-officers-to-join-nato-mission-in-iraq/>

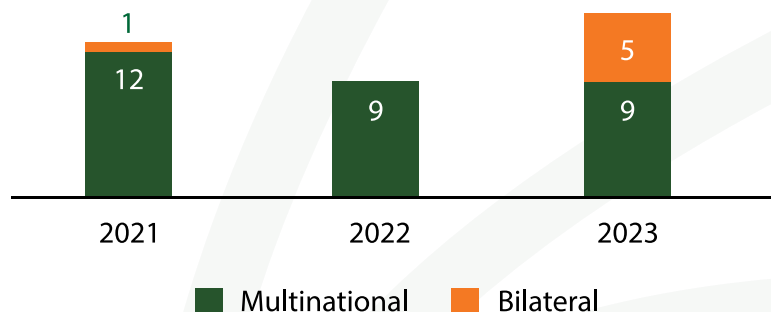


BCSP



Balkan  
Defence  
Monitor

## MILITARY EXERCISES



## MILITARY EXERCISES

Based on the response from the MoD of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was estimated that there were 14 military exercises. Nine of the 14 exercises were multilateral, with four conducted with NATO and three US-led multilateral exercises. Two of these multilateral exercises were regional, with one being the “Strong Balkan 23 (B-9),” and the second one was the one in which the military medical team took part in an exercise organised by the Balkan Medical Task Force (BMTF). There were five military exercises in 2023. Two were done with Turkey, with Bosnia and Herzegovina being an observer in the “Anatolian Phoenix 2023” exercise. While the regional initiative Adriatic Charter (A-5) held an exercise called “Laufer 23”, Bosnia and Herzegovina participated in it on a bilateral basis with Croatia. One bilateral exercise was held with Italy. Bosnia and Herzegovina also took part in an exercise, “Adriatic Strike 2023”, gathering NATO members and NATO partner countries. The MoD of Bosnia and Herzegovina classified this exercise as a bilateral exercise, but it was impossible to determine the partner country for this exercise.

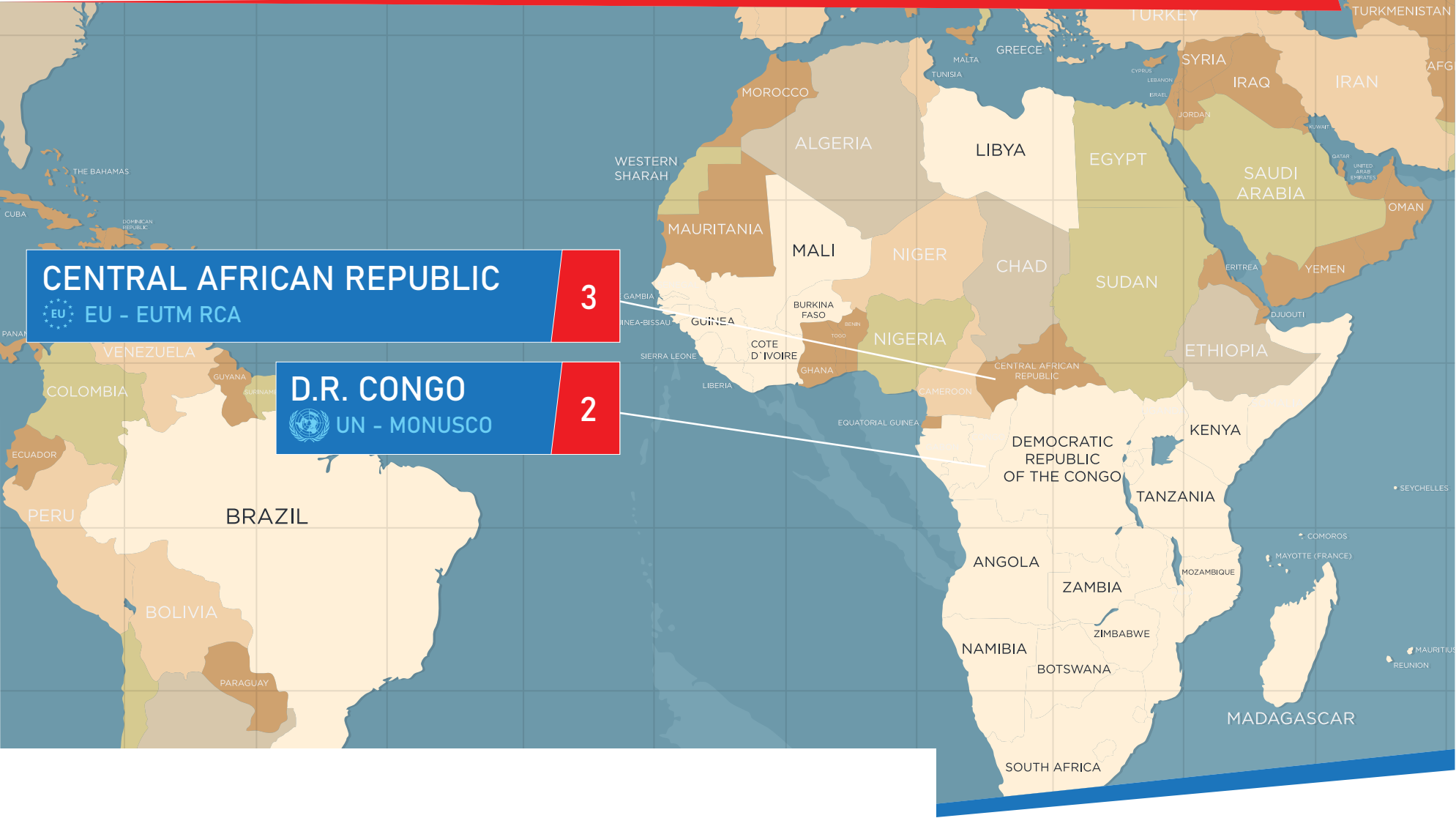
## DONATIONS

The response from the MoD did not include information on foreign military donations. Based on an open-source search, it is estimated that the EU was the largest donor to the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the total value being EUR 26 million. Under the European Peace Facility (EPF), the EU pledged an Assistance Measure to Bosnia and Herzegovina worth EUR 10 million for demining efforts. In addition, the EU approved further EUR 10 million for field equipment, military engineering tools and CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear) material for the Tactical Support Brigade. The donations also involved the EUR 6 million Assistance Measure under the EPF for the Balkan Medical Task Force.<sup>1</sup> Germany donated EUR 410.000, with EUR 350.000 being the value of IT equipment for the Training Centre for Peace Support Operations (PSOTC) and the EUR 60.000 support for the demining battalion.<sup>2</sup>

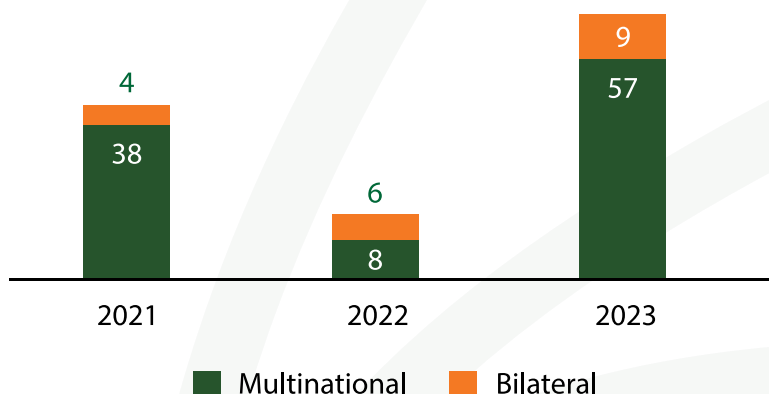
- 1 EU delivers medical and transport vehicles to BiH Armed Forces to support demining, 30 November 2023, Delegation of the European Union to Bosnia and Herzegovina & European Union Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/bosnia-and-herzegovina/eu-delivers-medical-and-transport-vehicles-bih-armed-forces-support-demining\\_en?s=219](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/bosnia-and-herzegovina/eu-delivers-medical-and-transport-vehicles-bih-armed-forces-support-demining_en?s=219)
- 2 Germany donates 410 thousand Euros to BiH Ministry of Defense, 27 November 2023, Sarajevo Times, <https://sarajevotimes.com/germany-donates-410-thousand-euros-to-bih-ministry-of-defense/>



# BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA



## MILITARY EXERCISES



## MILITARY EXERCISES

While the Croatian MoD does not respond to FOI requests, the open-source search led to the compilation of data through the Croatian MoD's website and relied on the plan of military exercises that the Croatian government adopted in early 2023. Based on these two sources of data, it was established that Croatia had 66 military exercises in 2023. Most of these were multilateral exercises, totalling 57 of which 47 were with NATO or multilateral exercises led by major NATO powers to boost interoperability with NATO and the application of NATO standards. Two exercises were held with the EU. There were also eight regional exercises done under the auspices of various regional initiatives, including three with the Regional Multinational Division Centre, one with the Adriatic Charter (A-5), two with the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (ADRION), one with the Defence Cooperation Initiative (DECI) and one with the Central European Defence Cooperation. Bilaterally, there were nine international military exercises, including the US (5 exercises), France (2 exercises), the UK (1 exercise) and Italy (1 exercise). These exercises were diverse in scope and nature as the individual exercises involved regular troops, special forces, the navy, air force, military police, cyber defence and computer-assisted exercises, among others.

## DONATIONS

Just like in 2021 and 2022, the US again became Croatia's largest military donor. The combined value of donations and grants from the US to Croatia is USD 202.1 million. These involve an agreement with the US on a foreign military assistance programme worth USD 140 million (EUR 152 million). The acquisition of 89 infantry fighting vehicles, Bradley from the US, involves Croatia providing USD 145,2 million and the US providing USD 57 million. Croatian special forces also received three Rigid Inflatable Boats (RIBs) from the US worth USD 5.1 million. The UK donated IT equipment of unspecified monetary value.<sup>1</sup>

### TOP FOREIGN DONORS 2023

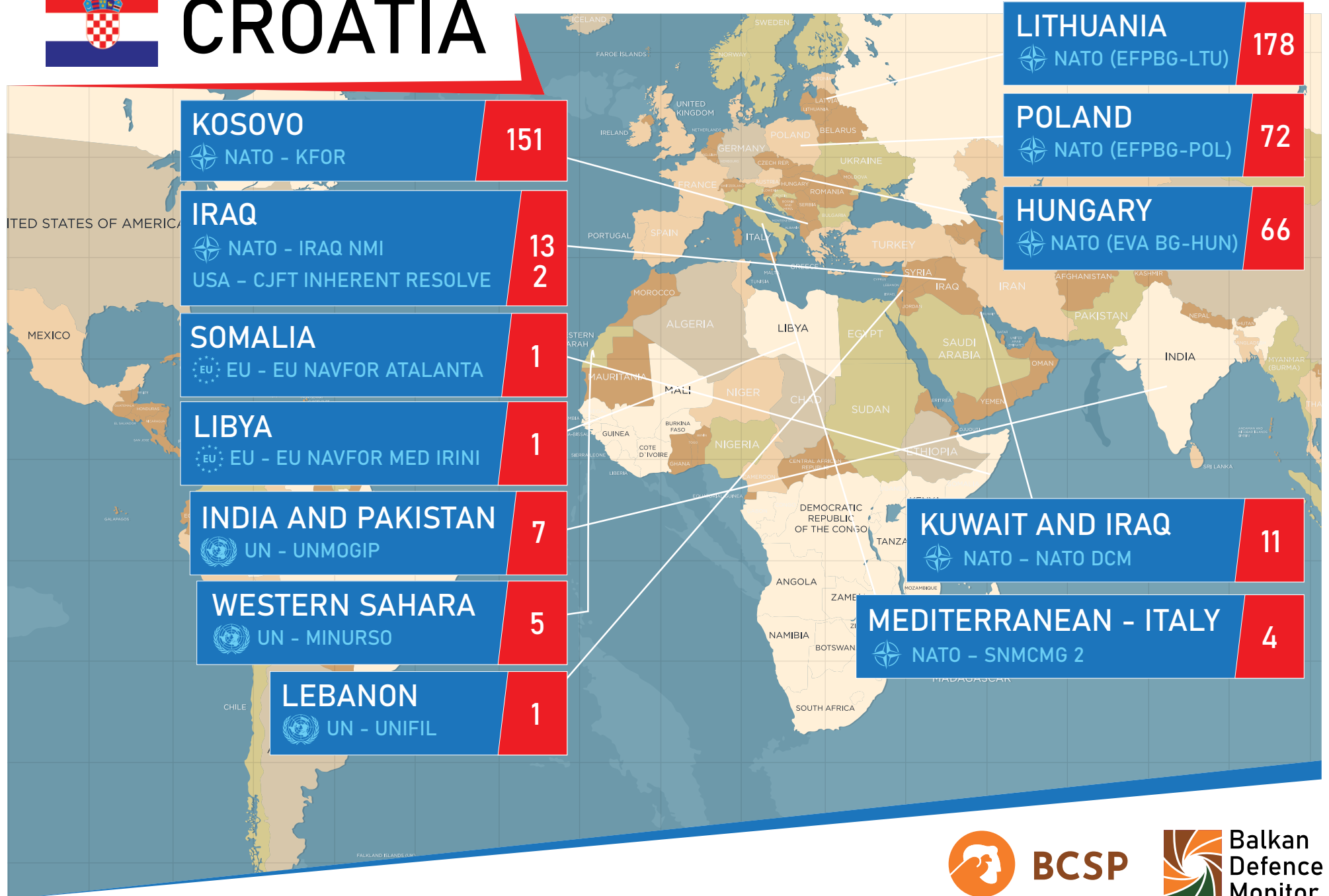
**United States of America**  
**USD 202.1 million**

<sup>1</sup> Doniranje informatičke tehničke opreme Upravi J2 Zajedničkog štaba Oružanih snaga Bosne i Hercegovine [Donation of IT technical equipment to the J2 Directorate of the Joint Headquarters of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina], 2 February 2023, Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, [http://os.mod.gov.ba/vijesti/default.aspx?id=471110&langTag=en-US&template\\_id=181&pageIndex=1](http://os.mod.gov.ba/vijesti/default.aspx?id=471110&langTag=en-US&template_id=181&pageIndex=1)

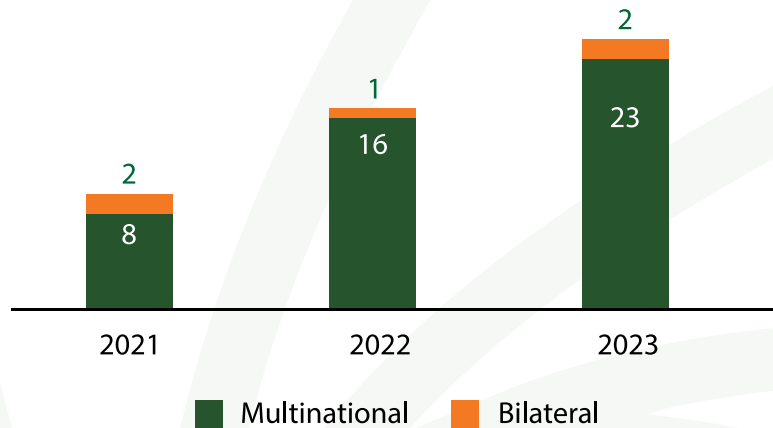




# CROATIA



## MILITARY EXERCISES



## MILITARY EXERCISES

Based on the response from the MoD and from open-source research, it is estimated that Montenegro participated in 25 military exercises in 2023, and 23 of these exercises were multilateral. When it comes to multilateral exercises, 17 were NATO exercises, one was a multilateral US-led exercise, and one was a Greece-led exercise. Within the NATO exercise, the one that sticks out was “Common Challenge 23”, hosted by Montenegro, which focused on elite mountain warfare. Four exercises were under the auspices of regional initiatives, one with the Adriatic Charter (A-5), two with the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (ADRION) and the regional special forces exercise “Strong Balkan 23 (B-9)”;

## DONATIONS

There is limited information on international military donations to Montenegro in 2023. Turkey appears to be the greatest military donor in 2023, having donated three logistic vehicles worth USD 1.2 million. Slovenia donated seven mountain guns and 112 salvos for the Honorary Guard, but there is no estimate of the monetary value of this donation.

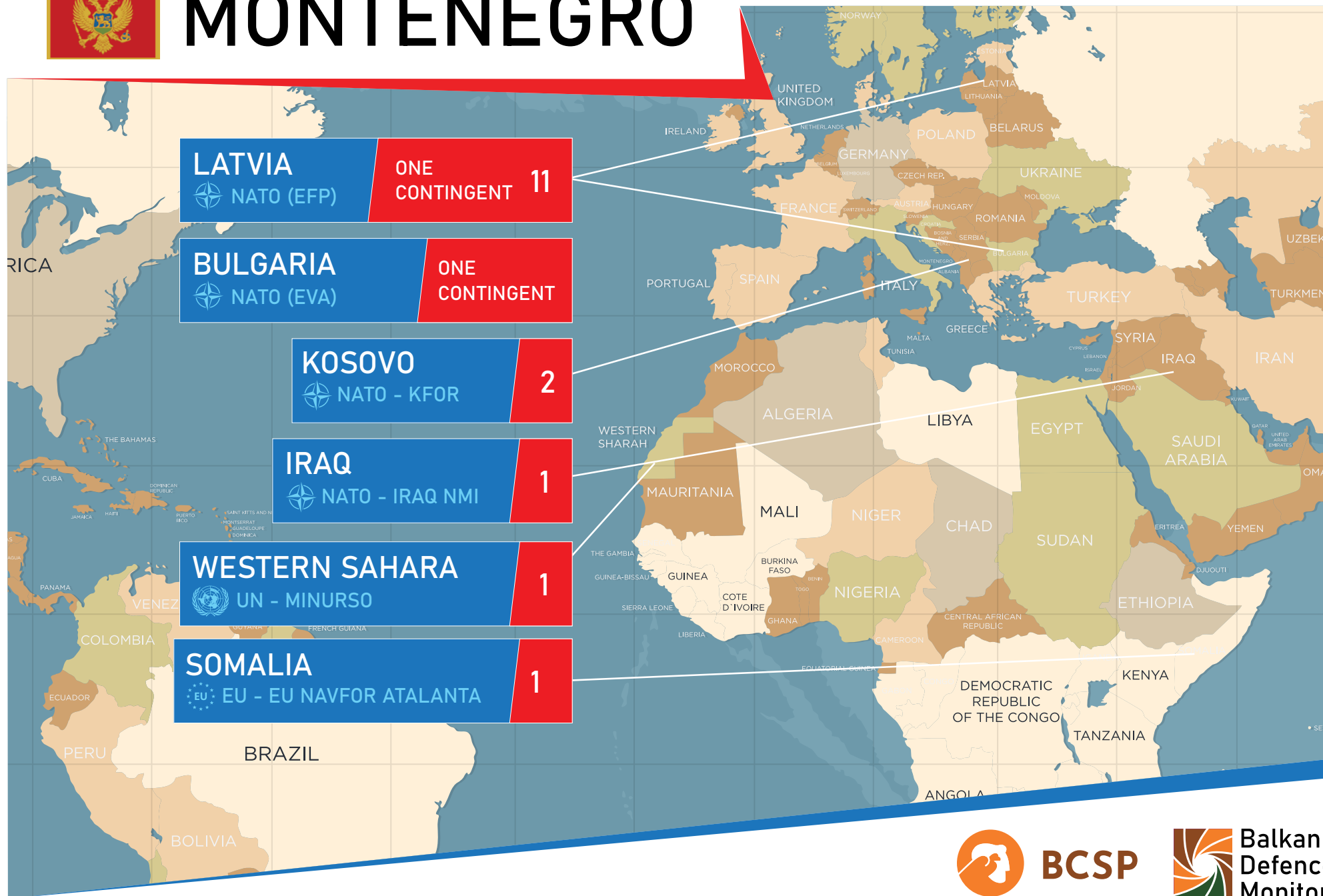
### TOP FOREIGN DONORS 2023

Turkey

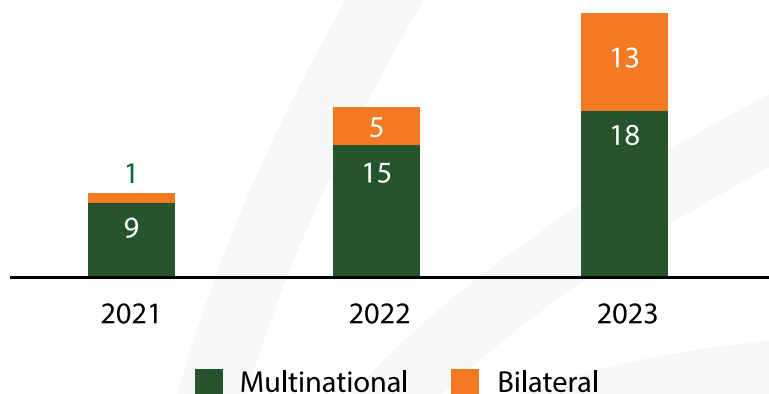
USD 1.2 million



# MONTENEGRO



## MILITARY EXERCISES



## MILITARY EXERCISES

In 2023, North Macedonia participated in 31 international military exercises. Among these exercises, 13 were bilateral and 18 were multilateral. Regarding bilateral military exercises, five were conducted with the US, four with Turkey, two with Greece and one with the UK and France, respectively.

NATO and its Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme absolutely dominate when it comes to multilateral international military exercises in which North Macedonia participated. Nine of these exercises were done under the auspices of NATO, among which there were two cyber security exercises, including “Cyber Unity 23” and “Cyber Coalition 23”. Five exercises were led by the US to prepare the US army and the ally armies to operate under NATO standards. Three exercises were regional in scope, like the “Laufer 23” implemented within the Adriatic Charter (A-5), “Strong Balkan 23 (B-9)”; a regional exercise intended to boost interoperability with NATO, and exercise “Maple Arch 23” held under the auspice South-Eastern Europe Brigade (SEEBRIG) to bring the participating countries closer to NATO standards. The North Macedonian Army also participated in “Triglav Star 23” with Slovenia, UK, and Colorado Army National Guard participation.

## DONATIONS

The North Macedonian MoD could not provide an absolute value of all the donations in 2023, but the approximate value was provided. It was impossible to extrapolate the exact timeframe of these donations based on the MoD’s response and the open sources. However, based on the provided data, the US military

### TOP FOREIGN DONORS 2023

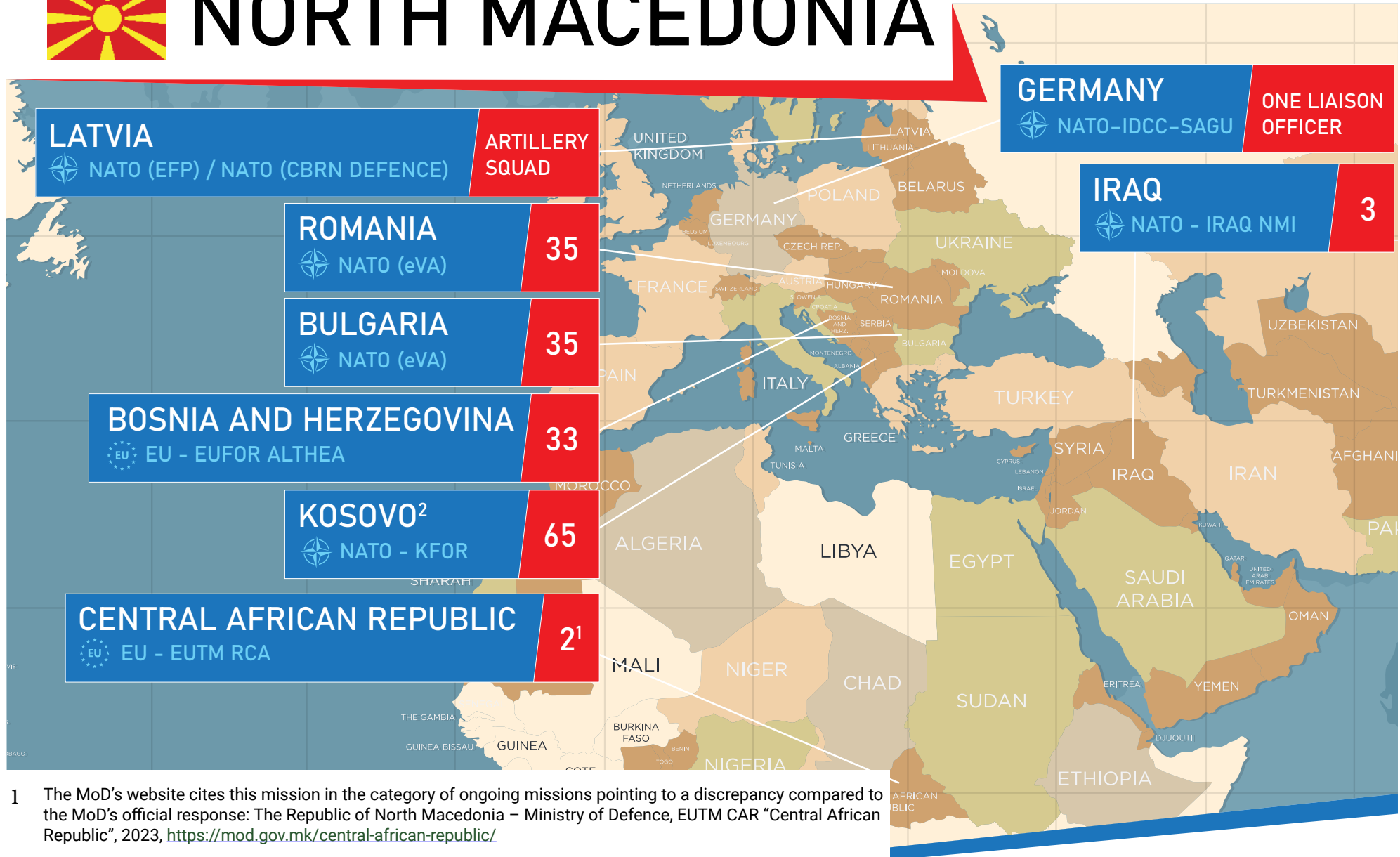
EU - the European Peace Facility (EPF)

EUR 9 million

donations are valued at approximately USD 3.718.792, followed by the UK, whose donations were approximately GBP 100.000. It was not possible to identify the exact content of the UK donations. Still, the US donations mostly involved the donation of spare parts, including for armoured vehicles and measurement instruments. Lithuania also donated spare parts to North Macedonia, although it was not possible to identify the monetary value. However, the largest military donation to North Macedonia was from the EU, as the European Peace Facility (EPF) provided assistance worth EUR 9 million intended for the equipment of the light infantry battalion group to enhance the ability to participate in EU military missions under the auspices of EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy.



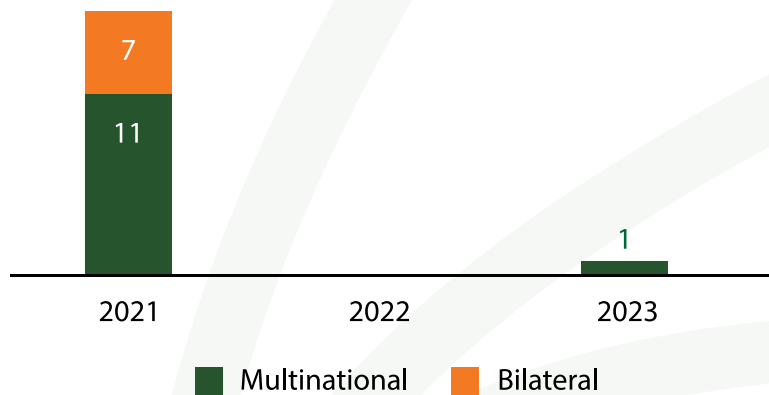
# NORTH MACEDONIA



1 The MoD's website cites this mission in the category of ongoing missions pointing to a discrepancy compared to the MoD's official response: The Republic of North Macedonia – Ministry of Defence, EUTM CAR "Central African Republic", 2023, <https://mod.gov.mk/central-african-republic/>

2 KFOR's website indicates that the number of North Macedonian troops participating in the mission is 60, showing a minor discrepancy between KFOR's online data and the data available on the website of the North Macedonian MoD

## MILITARY EXERCISES



## MILITARY EXERCISES

In 2023, the participation of the Serbian Armed Forces in international exercises, either bilateral or multilateral, was shaped by the Serbian Government’s decision from late February 2022 to abort all activities related to planning, preparing and conducting the exercises with foreign partners. This decision was made in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. However, in 2023, the Serbian Government exempted “the Platinum Wolf 2023”, a military exercise co-organised by the United States European Command and Serbian Armed Forces and hosted by Serbia, from the 2022 decision, making it the only international military exercise in which Serbian Armed Forces participated in 2023.

## DONATIONS

In 2023, Serbia signed four international agreements on donations, one with China and three with the US. It has not been specified whether these agreements have been implemented, but the data on their monetary value were disclosed in the response by the Serbian MoD. A major change compared to the previous years, when the US dominated as the military donor, is that this year’s donation from China exceeds all the US donations aggregate. In March 2023, Serbia and China signed an agreement on free military

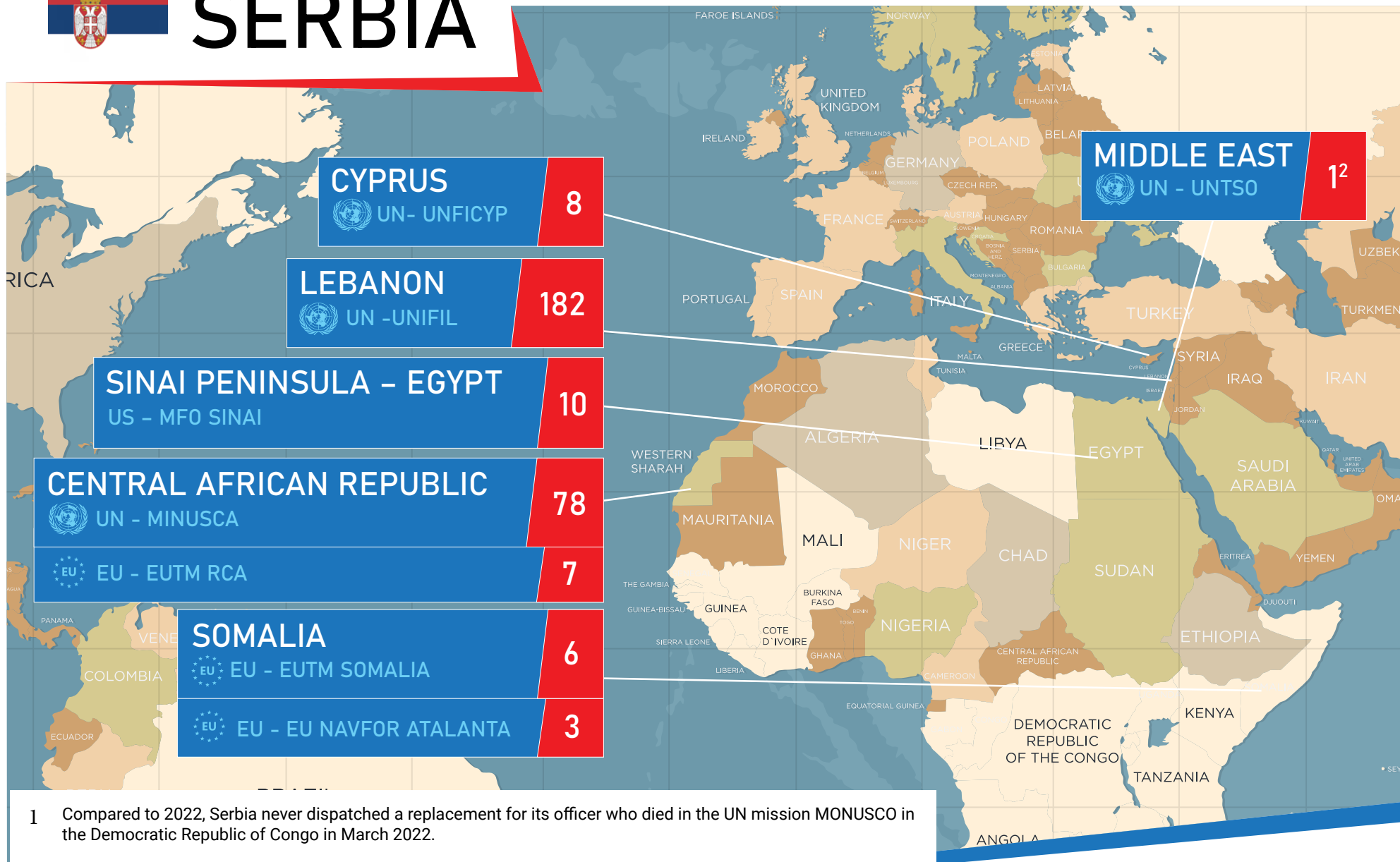
### TOP FOREIGN DONORS 2023

**China**  
**EUR 6.7 million**  
**United States of America**  
**USD 252.806,88**

aid to Serbia valued at 50 million Chinese yuan or EUR 6.700.000. No other data on this donation were available, including its exact content of equipment and when the donation was implemented. Within the Global Initiative for Peace Operations Fund, the US signed an agreement to donate USD 155.832 to the Serbian military to cover the warehousing and transportation expenses for assembly facilities. A protocol was signed for the US to donate military tents, “Shelter Base X307 16x35”, worth USD 75.232 to the Serbian Armed Forces. The US also signed an agreement to donate IT equipment worth USD 21.742,88 to the Serbian military.



# SERBIA



<sup>1</sup> Compared to 2022, Serbia never dispatched a replacement for its officer who died in the UN mission MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo in March 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Compared to the Balkan Defence Monitor 2023, when it was specified that the member of the Serbian Armed Forces within this mission was stationed in Lebanon, it was not possible to identify in which Middle Eastern country this individual is currently located given that UNTSO has several liaison facilities in the region and given the ongoing war in Gaza



**Balkan** 2024  
**Defence  
Monitor**

# Women in defence system



**BCSP**  
Belgrade Centre  
for Security Policy



# WOMEN IN THE DEFENCE SYSTEM

## REGIONAL OVERVIEW

In the area of women, peace, and security, Montenegro has recently renewed its strategic documents, while North Macedonia still has a valid action plan. However, in other countries of the region, the WPS documents have expired, and some countries, like Serbia, are working on creating new plans.

According to available data, Albania and Croatia have the highest percentage of women among uniformed personnel, while Montenegro leads in the percentage of women working as civilians in the defence sector. Serbia and Montenegro have the highest participation of women among enlisted personnel, while Albania and North Macedonia have the highest percentage of female officers. The participation of women non-commissioned officers is generally low throughout the region, but Albania and North Macedonia are examples of good practice. Due to the relatively late admission to military schools and the still present glass ceiling in the army, women have a slow career development. Albania and Croatia are the only countries that have appointed women to the rank of brigadier general, while many women in other countries are waiting for higher appointments. Lastly, Serbia has the highest participation of women in multinational operations/missions, while Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia has the lowest participation of women in missions abroad.

	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Croatia	Montenegro	North Macedonia	Serbia
Valid WPS action plan	No data	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
% of women civilians	37	45	51	66	29	55
% of women uniformed personnel of total number in the AF	15	9	14	11.5	10	11
% of women officers	21	8	No data	17	20	12
% of women NCOs	13.5	6	No data	6	12	4
% of women enlisted personnel	11	12	No data	16	6	18
The highest rank for women in the military	Brigadier General	Colonel	Brigadier General	Major	Colonel	Colonel
% of women in command and leadership positions	44 women	68 women	12 in CAF	51 in MoD and 8 in AF	19	25 in MoD and 7 in SAF
% of women in military operations	5	None	9	7	4	13



**National Action Plan 1325:** In 2018, Albania adopted its first two-year action plan on women, peace and security. The date of adoption of the Albanian government's second plan remain unclear. However, the Ministry of Defence officially said that it has submitted its findings to the Ministry of Health and Social Protection responsible for compiling a comprehensive summary report on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in Albania.



**Participation of women in the MoDs and the Armed Forces:** Albania has achieved the **NATO standard of 15% of female uniformed personnel in the army**. However, Albania is the only country in the region with the quota for women in the army (15%) that can affect their further admission. In 2023, **Albania had the highest percentage of women officers and non-commissioned officers in the Western Balkans**, comprising 21% of officers and 13.5% of NCOs. Still, the percentage of female enlisted personnel (11%) remains lower than other countries in the region. The MoD has a civil employee representation rate of 37% women.



**Representation of women in command and leadership positions:** The current representation of women in leadership positions is approximately 10%, which equates to 44 women. Manushaqe Shehu, the first female Deputy Chief of General Staff, holds the highest rank of Major General in the Albanian Armed Forces since 2018. In addition, Albania had two women as its defence ministers until 2020.



**Participation of women in peacekeeping operations:** The percentage of women participating in missions abroad remains at 5%.



**The National Action Plan 1325:** The third national action plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda expired in 2022 and new is not yet developed. However, the new Gender Action plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2023-2027 includes a chapter on Gender and Security, which states the goals to be achieved in the area by 2027.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the key topics of the third local action plan on 1325 are mainstreamed in other strategic documents dealing with migration and asylum seeking, prevention of terrorism and control of small arms and light weapons.



**Participation of women in the MoDs and the Armed Forces:** Compared to the previous research, the total number of professional military personnel and civil servants shows an increase in the representation of women by one percent, but women stagnate in the ranks of officers, non-commissioned officers and enlisted personnel. According to data from the Ministry of Defence of BiH, the Armed Forces had about 8734, soldiers and 791 civilian employees in 2023. Among them, there are 758 women as uniformed personnel or 9 percent of the total number, while 107 women or 45 percent work as civilians.<sup>2</sup> Women make up a quarter of the civilian employees of the Ministry of Defence. In the Armed Forces, about 143 women, or 8 percent of the total number, are officers in the ranks of brigadier, colonel, major, captain, lieutenant, and second lieutenant. A positive development is that in 2023, the Armed Forces received their first female pilot, Draženka Panić.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, there are 148 female non-commissioned officers, or about 6 percent of their total number. These are the ranks of sergeant, senior sergeant, sergeant first class, staff sergeant and chief sergeant. Finally, around 12 percent constitute female enlisted personnel.

According to the media reports, about 270 women in the Armed Forces identify themselves as Bosniaks regardless of their religion.<sup>4</sup> Until recently, wearing hijab in the military was not allowed by the rules of service. The policy changed after Emela Mujanović, one of the hijab-wearing soldiers, sued the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina for discrimination. To solve the problem, Defence Minister Zukan Helez recently proposed changes to allow the wearing of headscarves of the same material and colour as the uniform.<sup>5</sup>

1 Gender action plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2023-2027, February 2023, <https://arsbih.gov.ba/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/GAP-BiH-2023-2027-Bosanski-jezik-1.pdf>

2 Radio Slobodna Evropa, „U Oružanim snagama BiH sve više žena, nijedna sa činom generala,“ [There are more and more women in the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, none with the rank of general], 16 May 2023, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/bosna-hercegovina-zene-vojska/32413772.html>

3 Hercegovina info, „JEDINA ŽENA PILOT U ORUŽANIM SNAGAMA BiH Draženka je savladala sve prepreke i sada ruši tabue,“ [THE ONLY WOMAN PILOT IN THE ARMED FORCES OF BIH Draženka has overcome all obstacles and is now breaking taboos], 10 December 2023, <https://www.hercegovina.info/vijesti/bih/jedina-zena-pilot-u-oruzanim-snagama-bih-drazenka-je-savladala-sve-prepreke-i-sada-rusi-tabue/219633/>

4 Radio Slobodna Evropa, „Uposlenice sa hidžabom ‘problem’ za pravosuđe BiH,“ [Female employees with hijab a ‘problem’ for the judiciary of Bosnia and Herzegovina], 29 August 2023, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/bih-sudovi-pravosudje-hidzab/32569534.html>

5 Ibid.



**Representation of women in command and leadership positions:** There are 69 women appointed to leadership positions in the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces. The highest rank held by women in the Armed Forces of BiH is still that of Colonel. Nevertheless, two women and 36 men, who hold the rank of brigadier, are awaiting appointments to the rank of general.



**Participation of women in peacekeeping operations:** After an institutional deadlock in decision-making, the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina made a decision in 2023 to deploy two members of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the UN in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and three members of the Armed Forces to the European Union (EU) Training Mission in the Central African Republic (EUTMRCA).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Preporod info, „OSBiH angažirane u dvije mirovne misije: BH. put od konzumenta do aktera kolektivne sigurnosti,“ [Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina engaged in two peacekeeping missions: BH. the path from the consumer to the actor of collective security], 25 December 2023, <https://preporod.info/bs/article/48457/osbih-angazirane-u-dvije-mirovne-misije-bh-put-od-konzumenta-do-aktera-kolektivne-sigurnosti>



**The National Action Plan 1325:** Croatia's second Action Plan 1325 on women, peace and security expired in 2023. In June 2023, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs published the latest report on the implementation of the National Action Plan 1325 for the period of 2021 and 2022.<sup>7</sup>



**Participation of women in the MoDs and the Armed Forces:** The number and share of women among the personnel employed in the Ministry of Defence and the Croatian Army slightly increased in the last year. According to the annual defence report (2022), out of 14,562 active military personnel, on December 31, 2022, there were 2,046 women or 14%.<sup>8</sup> In the category of civil servants and employees, out of 1,872 employees on December 31, 2022, there were 957 women or 51%.<sup>9</sup> The data on the proportion of women among officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and enlisted personnel are not available. In the academic year 2022/2023, out of 417 students enrolled in the Croatian Military Academy, 93 are women, of which six women and 34 men from abroad. In 2022, 22 women out of 71 cadets graduated from the Military Academy.



**Representation of women in command and leadership positions:** The share of women in command and leadership positions remains unchanged (12%), while 13% of women were promoted to a higher rank in 2022.



**Participation of women in peacekeeping operations:** During 2022, a total of 29 members of the Croatian Army participated in three United Nations missions (UNMOGIP – India and Pakistan, MINURSO – Western Sahara, UNIFIL – Lebanon), including seven female members. However, in all peace support operations and missions abroad, the share of women was 9%.

7 Republika Hrvatska, Ministarstvo vanjskih i europskih poslova, Nacionalni akcijski plan provedbe Rezolucije Vijeća sigurnosti Ujedinjenih naroda 1325 (2000) o ženama, miru i sigurnosti, te srodnih rezolucija, za razdoblje od 2019. do 2023. godine, [National action plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, and related resolutions, for the period from 2019 to 2023] <https://mvep.gov.hr/informacije-za-gradjane-244593/ugovori-dokumenti-i-obraci/dokumenti/nap-ii/27171> <https://mvep.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/2023/datoteke/Izvje%C5%A1%C4%87e-NAPII-2021-2022.pdf>

8 Data on the representation of women among NCOs and enlisted personnel are not available in the annual defence report for 2022. For this reason, it is not possible to make a comparison with other countries in the region.

9 Vlada Republike Hrvatske, Godišnje izvješće o obrani za 2022. Godinu, [Annual Defense Report for 2022], 2 November 2023, [https://www.sabor.hr/sites/default/files/uploads/sabor/2023-11-03/095806/GOD\\_IZVJ\\_OBRANA\\_2022.pdf](https://www.sabor.hr/sites/default/files/uploads/sabor/2023-11-03/095806/GOD_IZVJ_OBRANA_2022.pdf)



**The National Action Plan 1325:** In late 2023, the Government of Montenegro adopted the Strategy for the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 - Women, Peace and Security and accompanying resolutions for the period 2024-2027, with the Action Plan for 2024-2025.<sup>10</sup> This is the third strategic document that includes the goals of the UNSC Resolution 1325 in Montenegro. The Ministry of Defence has created a special section on women in the defence on its official website, which ensures greater transparency and facilitates access to information on gender equality in the defence sector.<sup>11</sup>



**Participation of women in the MoD and the Armed Forces:** More than two thirds of the employees in the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces are women (66%), which is the highest percentage in the region. Still, the representation of women among professional military personnel has not significantly changed (11.55%). Among the professional military personnel, there are the most women in officer ranks, that is 17%. On the other hand, the representation of women is the lowest among non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and amounts to 6%. The highest rank held by women in the Army of Montenegro is still the rank of major, and in the coming period some women should be promoted to the ranks of lieutenant colonel/frigate captain and colonel/captain of battleships. Finally, 16% of women serve in the army as enlisted personnel.



**Representation of women in command and leadership positions:** Due to frequent changes of government, the first Minister of Defence of Montenegro, Prof. Dr. Olivera Injac remained in office for less than a year and a half (December 4, 2020 to April 28, 2022). Nonetheless, the percentage of women in managerial positions in the Ministry of Defence is quite high and amounts to 51%, while percentage of women in command positions in Montenegro's Armed Forces is 8%.<sup>12</sup> Until 2022, Major Sanja Pejović worked as a gender advisor in the NATO command structure SHAPE, that is, the country's first position in the NATO command structure.<sup>13</sup>



**Participation of women in peacekeeping operations:** According to the Strategy, Montenegro significantly increased participation of women in international missions and operations. So far, 28 women members of the MoD and AF have participated in missions in Afghanistan, Somalia (ATALANTA), Western Sahara (MINURSO) and in Kosovo (KFOR). In 2022 alone, six women were engaged, which is 11% of the total number of military personnel, while in 2023, 7% of women were engaged in multinational missions and operations.

10 Vlada Crne Gore, Strategija implementacije R SBUN 1325 - Žene, mir i bezbjednost i njoj pratećih rezolucija za period 2024-2027, sa AP za 2024-2025. godinu, [Strategy for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 - Women, peace and security and accompanying resolutions for the period 2024-2027, with AP for 2024-2025], 15 December 2023, <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/a8a5a5ef-a812-4097-a34c-3175d58eb871>

11 Vlada Crne Gore, Strategija implementacije Rezolucije Savjeta bezbjednosti Ujedinjenih nacija 1325, [Strategy for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325], 15 December 2023, <https://www.gov.me/mod/saradnja-sa-nvo>

12 The Strategy for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 - WPS and accompanying resolutions for the period 2024-2027, page 15.

13 Ibid.



**The National Action Plan 1325:** North Macedonia is in the fourth year of implementing its second Action Plan 1325 on Women, Peace and Security for the period 2020-2025.<sup>14</sup> In early 2023, the Ministry of Defence, with the help of the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF), took the first steps to prepare a gender self-assessment.<sup>15</sup>



**Participation of women in the MoDs and the Armed Forces:** According to Minister Slavjanka Petrovska, the results of the Ministry's work in promoting gender equality are visible, because in the last competition for the admission of cadets at the Military Academy, 14 of the 35 accepted cadets were women.<sup>16</sup> The long-term effects of gender policies are yet to be seen, but as of 2023, women make up 10 percent of the active personnel in the Army, of which 20% are officers, 13% non-commissioned officers and 6% enlisted personnel. Compared to the official statistics from 2022,<sup>17</sup> there is a decline in female civilians as less than one third of women (29%) work as civilian personnel in the army.

There is a veiled criticism in the Albanian media that the North Macedonian Army does not fully reflect the diversity in the society. According to the Euronews Albania reports, "Albanian women in the Army of North Macedonia are located mainly in the unit of professional soldiers, where out of 5.8% of women in total, only 1.6% are Albanian".<sup>18</sup>



**Representation of women in command and leadership positions:** North Macedonia is currently the only country in the region that has appointed a woman the Minister of Defence. Still, the share of women in command and management positions in the Ministry of Defence and the Army is 19%. According to the Army officials, the trend of enhancing the representation of women in the Army structure continues, especially in the officer ranks, since there are 3 colonels and 33 lieutenant-colonels in the Army.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the number of female majors, captains and lieutenants is considered satisfactory by the Army officials.



**Participation of women in peacekeeping operations:** The participation of women in military operations is 4% of female personnel assigned to UN, EU and NATO-led missions, which is a slight decrease compared to the last year research.<sup>20</sup>

14 <https://www.globalwps.org/data/MKD/files/2020-2025.pdf>

15 Ministry of Defence, Gender self-assessment in the Ministry of Defence and the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia, 17 February 2023, <https://mod.gov.mk/gender-self-assessment-in-the-ministry-of-defense-and-the-army-of-the-republic-of-north-macedonia/>

16 Republic of North Macedonia, Ministry of Defence, „Petrovska at the conference on gender equality and the OSCE perspective: women in security are not just numbers, they are value and quality,” 6 September 2023, <https://mod.gov.mk/petrovska-nakonferencija-rodova-ednakvost-osce-06-09-2023/>

17 Army of the Republic of North Macedonia, „Brave Macedonian women for whom the Army is a guarantee of peace and security of the state,” 8 March 2023, <https://mil.mk/military-stories/hrabri-makedonki-armijata-za-niv-e-garantiranje-na-mirot-i-sigurnosta-na-drzhavata/?lang=en>

18 Euronews Albania, “The only Albanian female soldier in N. Macedonia, part of the army for more than 15 years,” 9 March 2023, <https://euronews.al/en/the-only-albanian-female-soldier-in-n-macedonia-part-of-the-army-for-more-than-15-years/>

19 Army of the Republic of North Macedonia, „Brave Macedonian women for whom the Army is a guarantee of peace and security of the state,” 8 March 2023, <https://mil.mk/military-stories/hrabri-makedonki-armijata-za-niv-e-garantiranje-na-mirot-i-sigurnosta-na-drzhavata/?lang=en>

20 Balkan Defence Monitor, Women in Defence System, North Macedonia, 2023, <https://balkandefencemonitor.com/women-in-defence-system-north-macedonia-2023/>



**The National Action Plan 1325:** In late 2022, the Ministry of Defence began the process of developing the third action plan with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia. However, the first meeting of the government Working Group for the preparation of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council was held in August 2023<sup>21</sup> without presenting a new draft that is publicly available. Considering the dynamics, it can be concluded that the process of evaluating the previous plan and creating a new plan lasted for four years, which is longer than the implementation of the second plan (2017-2020) and may be an indicator of the lack of genuine political commitment to prioritise the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.



**Participation of women in the MoDs and the Armed Forces:** Despite the fact that military service in Serbia is more popular among women than among men, the high turnout of women in military schools and academies has not yet translated into their overall representation in the defence sector. This means that the share of women among **non-uniformed personnel (civilians) and uniform personnel in the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and in the Serbian Armed Forces (SAF) remains almost unchanged compared to 2022.** Currently, around 55% of women perform civilian duties, while 11% of women work as professional military personnel. Nonetheless, **Serbia is among the top countries in the region with 18% of women serving as enlisted personnel.** However, a similar progress is not visible among officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs), as only 12% of women serve as officers and 4% of women are NCOs. Still, a slight increase has been noted in all the categories compared to 2022.

In the previous period, there have been changes to the uniforms for female officers, non-commissioned officers and cadets which reflects efforts to improve the position of women in the military.<sup>22</sup>



**Representation of women in command and leadership positions:** Little has changed in the representation of women in leadership positions, as **25% of women hold managerial positions in the MoD, while 7% of women hold command positions in the Serbian Armed Forces.** The highest rank held by women in the Serbian Armed Forces is still that of colonel, and not a single woman has been promoted or appointed to a higher rank in the SAF and MoD based on the Decree passed at the beginning of 2023.<sup>23</sup>



**Participation of women in peacekeeping operations:** In 2023, Serbia contributed to eight peacekeeping missions, while women from the Army and police participated in two UN operations (UNFIL and MINUSCA) and two EU operations (EUTM Somalia and EUTM RCA). Compared to 2022, the participation of women in peacekeeping missions slightly decreased, and out of 295 members of peacekeeping forces, 38 women were sent abroad.

21 Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Defence, Meeting of Working Group responsible for drafting National Action Plan, 31 August 2023, <https://www.mod.gov.rs/eng/20432/sastanak-radne-grupe-za-izradu-nacionalnog-akcionog-plana20432>

22 Balkan Investigative Network, "Žene vojnici u Srbiji dobijaju poseban donji veš," [Female soldiers in Serbia receive special underwear], 18 September 2023, <https://www.balkansec.net/post/%C5%BEene-vojnici-u-srbiji-dobijaju-poseban-donji-ve%C5%A1>

23 Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Defence, "Ministar Vučević presents decrees on promotions and appointments," 9 March 2023, <https://www.mod.gov.rs/eng/19831/ministar-vucevic-urucio-ukaze-o-unapredjenjima-i-postavljenjima19831>





**Balkan** 2024  
**Defence  
Monitor**

**Strategic  
Documents**



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# REGIONAL OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS



## REGIONAL OVERVIEW

**Just like in 2021 and 2022, none of the Western Balkan countries adopted new defence strategies or national security strategies in 2023 either. The Albanian National Security Strategy was last adopted in 2014, and its National Defence Strategy a year later. Bosnia and Herzegovina has its National Security Strategy 2006 and the National Defence Strategy 2008. Croatia's last National Security Strategy is from 2017, and the National Defence Strategy was adopted back in 2002. Montenegro's National Security Strategy was adopted in 2018, and the National Defence Strategy in 2019. North Macedonia has a National Security Strategy from 2003 and a more recent National Defence Strategy from 2020. Serbia has the National Security Strategy and National Defence Strategy from 2020, although technically, the Serbian Parliament passed these documents in late December 2019.**

The challenge identified in the previous iteration of the project "Balkan Defence Monitor 2023" still remains in play. That challenge is the inability of the Western governments to strategically plan and formulate policies, as this process remains traditionally burdened with dysfunctional politics and slow bureaucracies.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, this challenge is in no small part also caused by the fact that defence and security policy remains exclusively reserved for the political elites, who frequently monopolise the policy-making process and make it a top-down procedure. The professionals from the government administration are frequently marginalised from this process, and so is wider society.<sup>2</sup>

Bosnia and Herzegovina remains the most troubling countries regarding its ability to adjust strategic and doctrinary documents with current trends in the regional, European, and global security, since its last National Security Strategy dates back to 2006 and the National Defence Strategy from 2008. The most recent strategic document in the region remains the North Macedonian National Defence Strategy of 2020, which had no foundation in the national security strategy that was last adopted in 2003. Given the enormous time span between these two documents, they are not convergent. The 2020 National Defence Strategy was primarily a product of the change which occurred when North Macedonia joined NATO that year, not of the comprehensive threat assessment envisaged by the National Security Strategies.

All of these documents are outdated, as none of them considers the transformations in European and global security generated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. So far, Albania and North Macedonia are the only countries with indications that new strategic documents are underway. On the Albanian MoD's website, both the National Security Strategy and National Defence Strategy are designated as "work in progress."<sup>3</sup> In early 2023, there were claims that a similar process was ongoing in North Macedonia,<sup>4</sup> but so far, without the outcome of new strategies being put forth.

These old documents still provide some contextually salient points. A military invasion used to be defined as a possible, but not probable national security threat. Indeed, the return of full-fledged war to the Balkans remains unlikely, given the Western deterrence in the form of NATO and the fact that the Balkan elites are risk-averse regarding their survival in power.<sup>5</sup> Equally important is that despite the weapons acquisition, the

1 Balkan Defence Monitor 2023, Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP), February 2023, <https://bezbednost.org/en/publication/balkan-defence-monitor-2023/>

2 Politički lideri samovoljno odlučuju o kupovini vojnih dronova (Political leaders arbitrarily decide on the purchase of military drones), Dnevnik zarobljene države (The Diary of Captured State) – Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP), <https://zarobljavanje.bezbednost.org/politicki-lideri-samovoljno-odlucuju-o-kupovini-vojnih-dronova/>

3 Strategic Documents, Ministry of Defence – Republic of Albania, January 2024, <https://www.mod.gov.al/eng/index.php/security-policies/strategic-documents>

4 Discussion: Lack of transparency a common problem in defence sector in Western Balkan, European Western Balkans, 28 February 2023, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2023/02/28/discussion-lack-of-transparency-a-common-problem-in-defence-sector-in-western-balkan/>

5 Dimitar Bechev, "War Won't Be Coming Back to the Balkans," War on the Rocks, 24 March 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/03/war-wont-be-coming-back-to-the-balkans/>

capacity of the Western Balkan countries to engage in a prolonged, all-out war because of the lack of a robust economy with sluggish growth<sup>6</sup> and, more importantly, demographic decline<sup>7</sup> is limited. This does not fully eliminate the possibility of an armed conflict, but significantly narrows the range of negative scenarios. Nevertheless, the weapons acquisition by the regional countries, security anxieties among all the Western Balkan countries caused by the Ukraine war, and localised acts of violence in the North of Kosovo will keep the idea of military invasion alive in the regional security discourse.

Nationalism and separatism are the common themes in all of the strategic documents. Despite being defined as national security threats within outdated strategic documents, paradoxically, these themes have become relevant in the regional security context. This is primarily due to practical developments, like the unresolved dispute over Kosovo's status between Belgrade and Priština, the political instability in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the well-established ability of the local political and security elites to invoke nationalism in order to strengthen their political legitimacy. Economic instability, mentioned in these strategic documents, is another issue that will become relevant in the future as uncertainty looms on handling the economic fallout from the ongoing conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine, rising living costs, higher prices of energy and food and inflation.

Terrorism and organised crime are referred to in these old documents. Organised crime is a transnational threat, not a novelty in the Western Balkans. Still, terrorism can potentially become more acute in case of any overspill from the Middle East in the context of the current Gaza conflict and religious radicalisation, particularly among the Balkan nationals who returned to their home countries after fighting for various militant and Jihadi groups in Middle Eastern conflicts.<sup>8</sup> The old West-centric agenda and commitment to peacekeeping mentioned in the old documents are still relevant. This is evident from the fact that NATO and the US dominate as security partners for all of the countries of the region, including those countries that are not NATO members, particularly in areas like international military exercises and peace missions. While Serbia has no ambition to join NATO, the 2023 trends show that the US became the dominant Serbian partner in military affairs. Belgrade's decision to exempt the "Platinum Wolf 2023" exercise with the US from the government's ban on international military exercises and the Serbian participation in the US-led peace mission in Sinai witness to this change.<sup>9</sup>

Strategic documents are normally intended to explain and justify major changes in national defence policies. However, while it is true that adopting new strategies is a long process in every country, it is evident that major policy decisions are made without having a solid foundation in strategic documents. Since 2015, Serbia and Croatia have been in the forefront of acquiring new weapon systems.<sup>10</sup> Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama pledged in July 2023 that his country would reach the 2% defence spending threshold mandated by NATO.<sup>11</sup> More recently, Serbian military officials again flaunted the idea of reinstating compulsory military service, a narrative that reappears almost every year in Serbia.<sup>12</sup>

In that context, strategic documents would primarily illuminate to the national public in the Western Balkan countries what international, strategic, and internal factors drive the policies. The latter is particularly important in demonstrating to society and citizens that national security is a public good, not just a privileged portfolio of the ruling political parties. Moreover, publishing strategic documents is also a valuable way to be more transparent about one's intentions, which helps build transparency among local countries and helps ease the tensions and potential security rivalries.

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6 Western Balkans Regular Economic Report, The World Bank, Fall 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/eca/publication/western-balkans-regular-economic-report>

7 Isabelle Marchais, "Depopulation in the Western Balkans," Jacques Delors Institute, July 2023, <https://institutdelors.eu/en/publications/les-balkans-occidentaux-en-voie-de-depeuplement/>

8 Vuk Vuksanovic, "The Spillover Effect: The Gaza Conflict and Potential Ramifications to the Western Balkans," Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP), January 2024, pp. 5-6, <https://bezbednost.org/en/publication/the-spillover-effect-the-gaza-conflict-and-potential-ramifications-to-the-western-balkans/>

9 Igor Mirosavljević, "Through military exercise with NATO members, Serbia leans towards cooperation with the West," European Western Balkans, 27 April 2023, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2023/04/27/through-military-exercise-with-nato-members-serbia-leans-towards-cooperation-with-the-west/>

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11 Alice Taylor, "Albania pledges to reach 2% NATO spending target by 2024," Euractiv, 10 July 2023, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/albania-pledges-to-reach-2-nato-spending-target-by-2024/>

12 Mila Manojlovic and Andy Heil, "Serbia's Vucic Weighs A Return To Military Conscription, Stirring Anger To His Left And Right," Radio Free Europe, 11 January 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/serbia-conscription-vucic-anger-modernizing-military/32770746.html>

## NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY: 2014

NO CHANGES IN 2023

## NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY: 2015



**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 SECURITY STRATEGY: 2006**

**NO CHANGES IN 2023**

**NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY: 2008**



**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 SECURITY STRATEGY: 2017

NO CHANGES IN 2023

## NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY: 2002



**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 SECURITY STRATEGY: 2018**

**NO CHANGES IN 2023**

**NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY: 2019**



**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. Geostrategic 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.

**NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY: 2003**

**NO CHANGES IN 2023**

**NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY: 2020**



**National interests and goals (as defined in the Strategies):** Protection of independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Northern Macedonia // Strengthening regional security and stability // Membership in collective security systems // Effective management of natural disasters, technical and technological disasters, epidemics and climate change



**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

NO CHANGES IN 2023

## NATIONAL DEFENCE 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.





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