



**Balkan** 2023  
**Defence  
Monitor**

# International Military Cooperation



**BCSP**  
Belgrade Centre  
for Security Policy

# INTERNATIONAL MILITARY COOPERATION



**In 2022, the year of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, four of the six analysed Western Balkan countries continued their international military cooperation in the context of their obligations as NATO member states. Although Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a member of the Alliance, most of Sarajevo's international military cooperation still revolves around NATO and its members. Serbia remains the regional outlier, upholding its military neutrality and foreign policy based on geopolitical balancing.**

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

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

In 2022, Serbia was the only country in the region that did not engage in international military exercises, based on the Government's decision to abort all activities related to military exercises due to the war in Ukraine. This was not the first time Belgrade made this type of decision. In late 2020, Serbia cancelled all its international military exercises for 6 months when it faced pressures from the EU as a result of the political crisis in Belarus.<sup>1</sup> Serbia still has not completely isolated itself in terms of military and defence policy, as it continues to maintain international military cooperation with its international partners, practices foreign visits by the defence minister and head of the general headquarters, holds consultations with foreign partners, implements study visits, and educates Serbian officers at institutions abroad. Nevertheless, these two decisions demonstrate that Serbian defence policies are still being shaped by the policy of military neutrality, the Belgrade's balancing act between Russia and the West, and the Kosovo dispute.

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

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1 European Western Balkans (EWB), Serbia suspends all military exercises for six months, NATO says they did not plan any, 10 Sept 2022, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/09/10/serbia-suspends-all-military-exercises-for-six-months-they-werent-even-planned-with-nato/>

The data was not always clear regarding military donations, but information provided by the relevant MoDs and public sources shows that the US, traditionally the biggest military donor to the Western Balkans, continued playing that role in the cases of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Significant military aid from the US was also announced for Montenegro, but it is not possible to determine whether this donation has materialised in 2022. The above should be viewed also in the context of the US announcing military aid to several countries in the region, to back them up in the wake of the Ukraine war.<sup>2</sup>

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

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

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, due to the blockade in the state institutions, the country also experienced a temporary blockade related to the rotation of contingents of the Armed Forces. Once the new collective Presidency was formed, a decision followed to continue participating in all the missions in which the country used to participate.<sup>6</sup> Sarajevo participates in the UN and EU-led missions but not in NATO missions at the moment, most probably due to a lack of consensus in the country regarding NATO. When it comes to Serbia, in line with Belgrade's policy of neutrality, the country continues to participate in the UN and EU missions while not sending any troops to those of NATO, not even under the auspices of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme.

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2 US Department of State, \$2.8 Billion in Additional U.S. Military Assistance for Ukraine and Its Neighbors – Press Statement of Anthony J. Blinken, Secretary of State, 8 Sept 2022, <https://www.state.gov/2-8-billion-in-additional-u-s-military-assistance-for-ukraine-and-its-neighbors/>

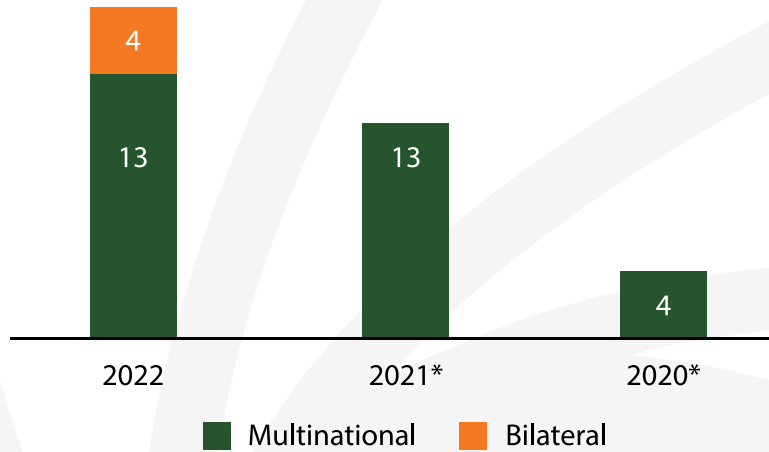
3 Republic of Serbia - Ministry of Defence, UNDP donates equipment for project promoting gender equality, 26 Jan 2022, <https://www.mod.gov.rs/eng/18310/undp-donirao-opremu-za-projekat-u-oblasti-rodne-ravnopravnosti-18310>

4 Republic of Serbia - Ministry of Defence, Minister Stefanović and Ambassador Hill at US donation handover to MMC "Karaburma", 5 May 2022, <https://www.mod.gov.rs/eng/18751/ministar-stefanovic-i-ambasador-hil-na-uru-cenju-americke-donacije-vmc-karaburma-18751>

5 Kosovo Force (KFOR), Contributing Nations, Oct 2022, <https://jfcnaples.nato.int/kfor/about-us/welcome-to-kfor/contributing-nations>

6 Response of the MoD of Bosnia and Herzegovina

## MILITARY EXERCISES



Based on open-source data, it is estimated that Albania has participated in 16 military exercises with NATO and NATO allies. If one adds bilateral exercises with the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) to this, the number rises to 20. Albania continues to conduct its military exercises within the framework of NATO and participate in military drills organised by the US, including the US military and the New Jersey Army National Guard, as well as those that are organised by the UK and Turkey. Also, the military medical team participated in an exercise under the auspices of the Balkan Medical Task Force (BMTF). These drills are multinational and include various categories, including regular troops, special forces and naval exercises.

## DONATIONS

The US and Turkey are traditionally the two largest military donors in Albania. The same was in 2021. The only difference compared to the previous year is that, in 2022, the overall value of Turkey's donation was higher than that of the US. From the Government of the Republic of Turkey, Albania received goods in the amount of USD 2,088,500, while from the Government of the United States of America it received goods in the amount of USD 1,436,136. Open-source research could only identify that Ankara has donated 40 vehicles (cars and buses) to the Albanian Armed Forces.

### TOP FOREIGN DONORS 2022

Turkey

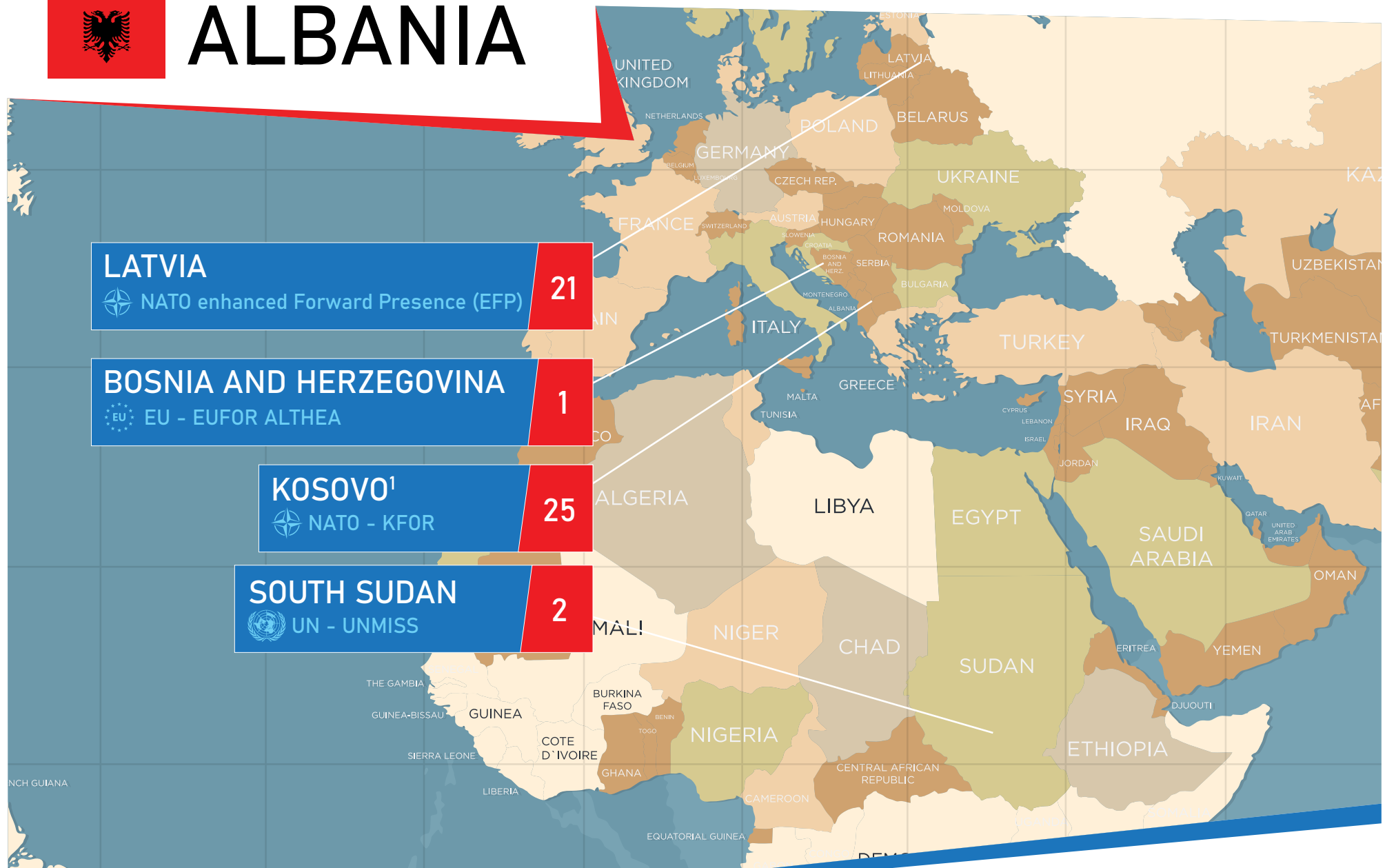
**EUR 2.088,500**

United States of America

**EUR 1.436,136**



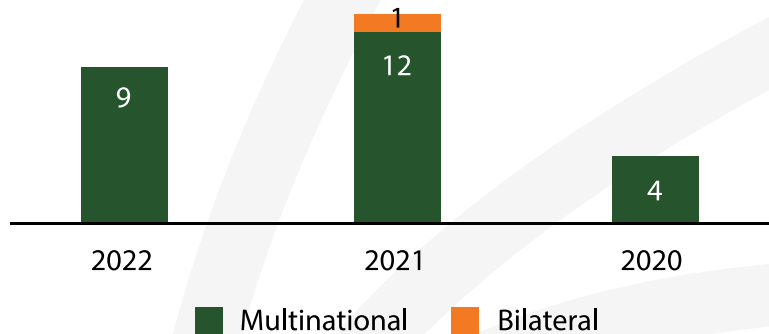
# ALBANIA



1 KFOR's website indicates that the number of Albanian troops participating in the mission is 61, showing a great discrepancy between various sources on the exact number



## MILITARY EXERCISES



The number of international military exercises in which Bosnia and Herzegovina participated was assessed through the response of the MoD and the analysis of publicly available sources. Based on those, it was estimated that there were 9 military exercises. Most of them were conducted through NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme or with major NATO powers such as the US and Turkey. Beyond international military exercises, particularly striking was the NATO exercise "Combined Effort 22", an evaluation exercise based on the NATO Operational Capabilities Concept (NEL-2), for which the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina received a positive assessment. The military medical team from Bosnia and Herzegovina participated in an exercise that was organised by the Balkan Medical Task Force (BMTF).

## DONATIONS

It is estimated that the US was a great source of donations to the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2022. That year, the US Congress approved USD 23 million in aid to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the form of two new helicopters to develop helicopter capacities within its Armed Forces. This package, besides the helicopters themselves, also included spare parts, multi-annual maintenance and pilot training.<sup>1</sup>

### TOP FOREIGN DONORS (2022)

United States of America

EUR 25,600,000

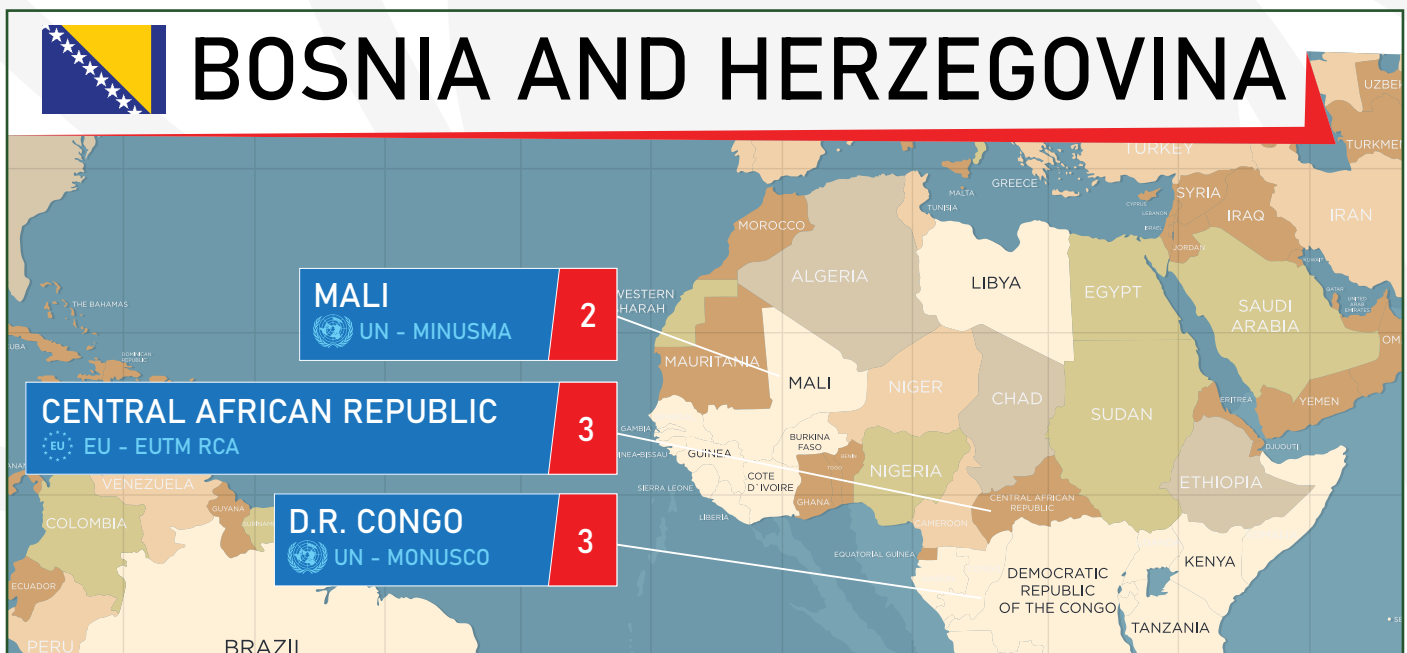
In July 2021, Bosnia and Herzegovina also received a donation of 21 Humvees (High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle - HMMWV), valued at USD 2.6 million. This donation was part of the bigger package of 86 HMMWV vehicles worth USD 14.3 million. These vehicles will be delivered as the production continues.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

1 Response of the Press Office of the US Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina

2 Ibid.



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

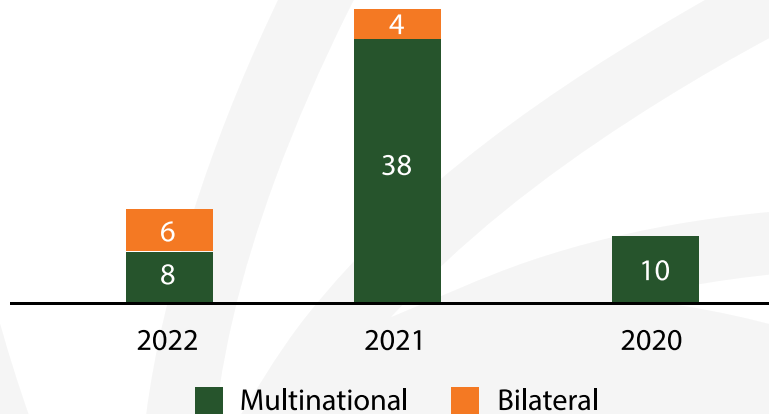


Multinational Operations - Data from 2021

**No members of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina participated in peace missions in 2022. Due to the decision-making deadlock in the institutions, there was a temporary freeze in the rotation of contingents of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in peace missions. However, the new Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina decided to continue the participation of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in all three missions, implying that the exact number of troops will be the same as in 2021.**

## MILITARY EXERCISES

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

## DONATIONS

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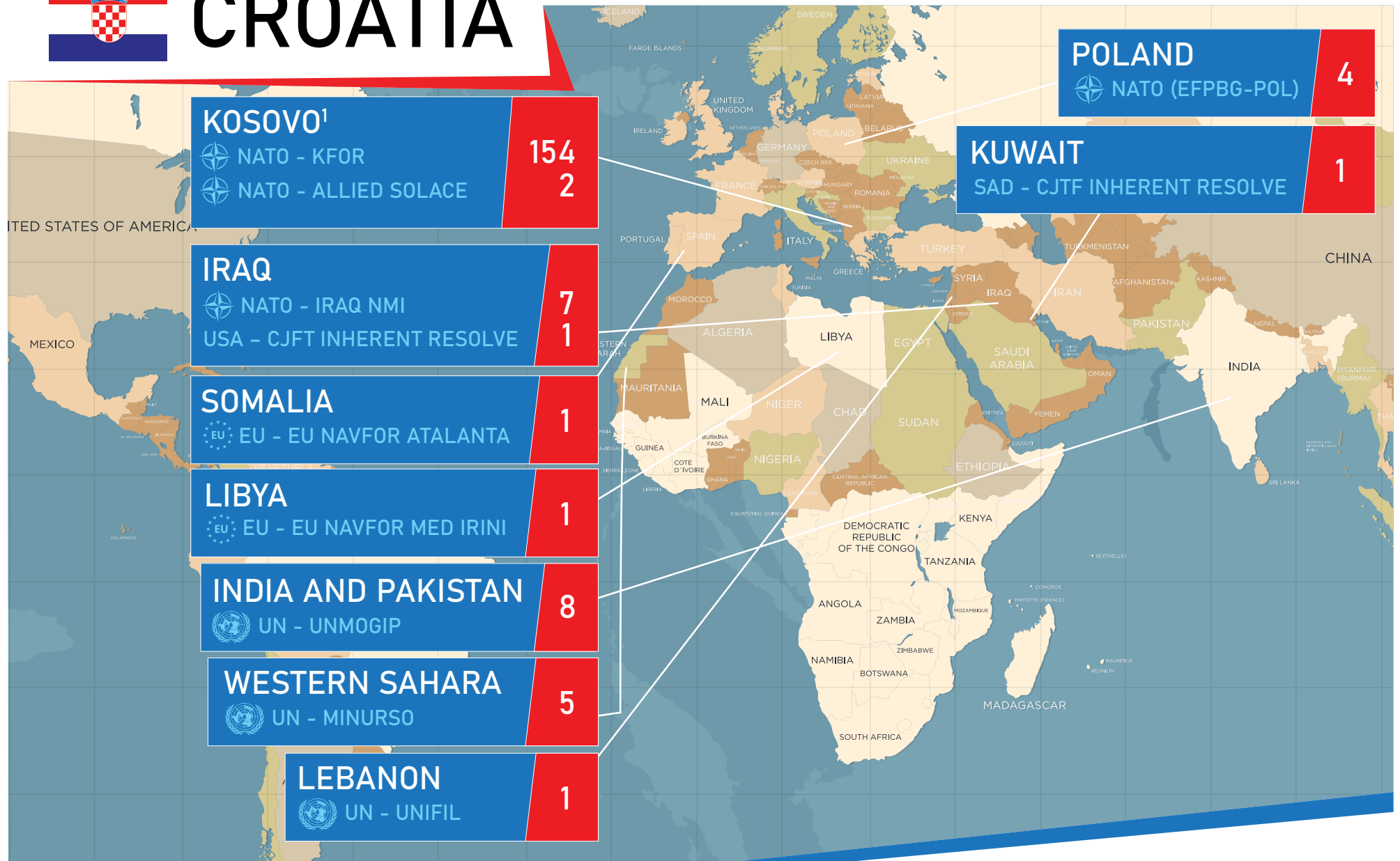
The United States appears to be the country’s biggest military donor, much like in 2021. In 2022, Croatia received two UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters from the US, estimated at USD 55 million.

To assist Croatia in acquiring Bradley infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs), the US pledged to provide USD 51.1 million in European Recapitalisation Incentive Programme (ERIP) financial aid to Croatia, with Croatia being obliged to secure the remaining USD 145.3 million of the total transaction amounting to USD 196.4 million. Some sources noted that, with the arrival of Black Hawk helicopters, the US military assistance to Croatia reached USD 685 million. It is not possible to determine the accuracy of this assessment and whether it took into account the deal on Bradley vehicles, which was made in the same period.





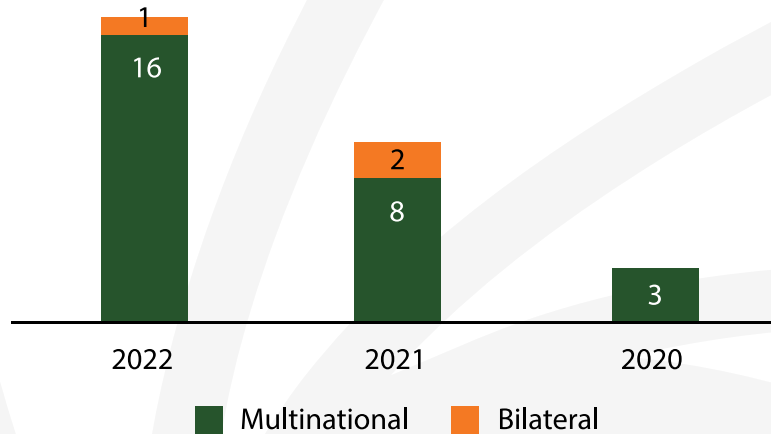
# CROATIA



1 KFOR's website indicates that the number of Croatian troops participating in the mission is 147, showing a discrepancy compared to the Croatian MoD's website



## MILITARY EXERCISES



As extrapolated from open-source research, it is estimated that Montenegro participated in 17 military exercises in 2022. Most were organised under the auspices of NATO, with one bilateral naval exercise with Slovenia. The military medical team from Montenegro participated in the exercise that was organised by the Balkan Medical Task Force (BMTF).

## DONATIONS

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

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

### TOP FOREIGN DONORS (2022)

United States of America

**EUR 23,000,000**

Norway

**USD 65,000**

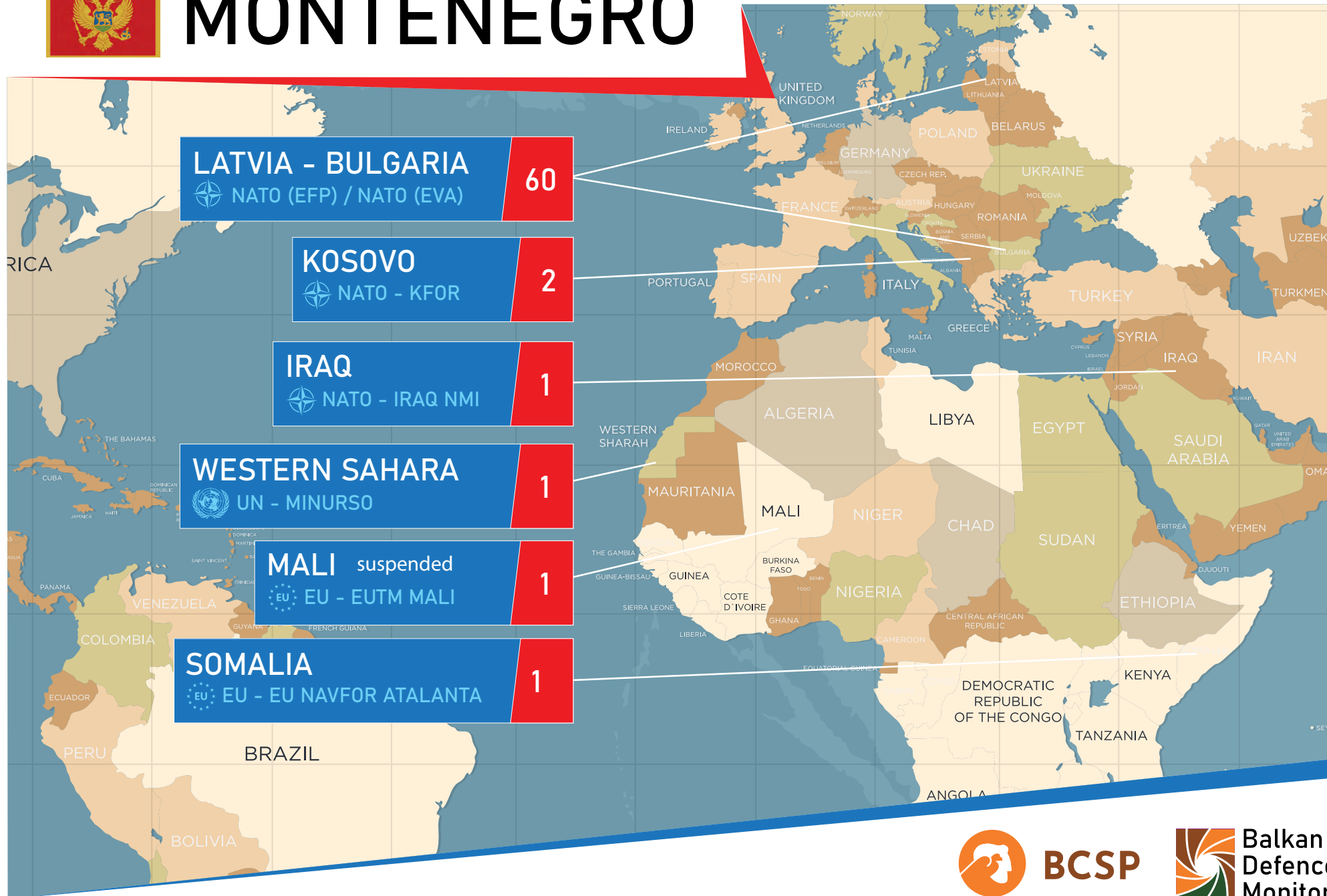
OSCE

**EUR 34,698**

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

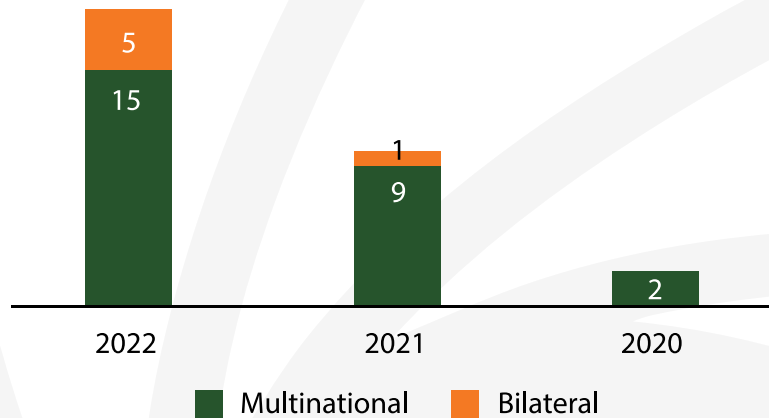


# MONTENEGRO



## MILITARY EXERCISES

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

## DONATIONS

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Based on data provided by the North Macedonian MoD, the UK's donation to North Macedonia amounted to GBP 377,738 (USD 454,154; EUR 438,119) and involved two transactions. These transactions most likely concerned the delivery of 14 mobile training units for operations in the urban environment. The United Kingdom also made another donation to North Macedonia, valued at EUR 100,000 when presented in Euros. There is no data on whether this relates to training units or other donations. Although North Macedonia is one of the NATO allies that are expected to receive military aid from the US in light of the war in Ukraine, no information related to military donations from the US in 2022 was found while doing research.

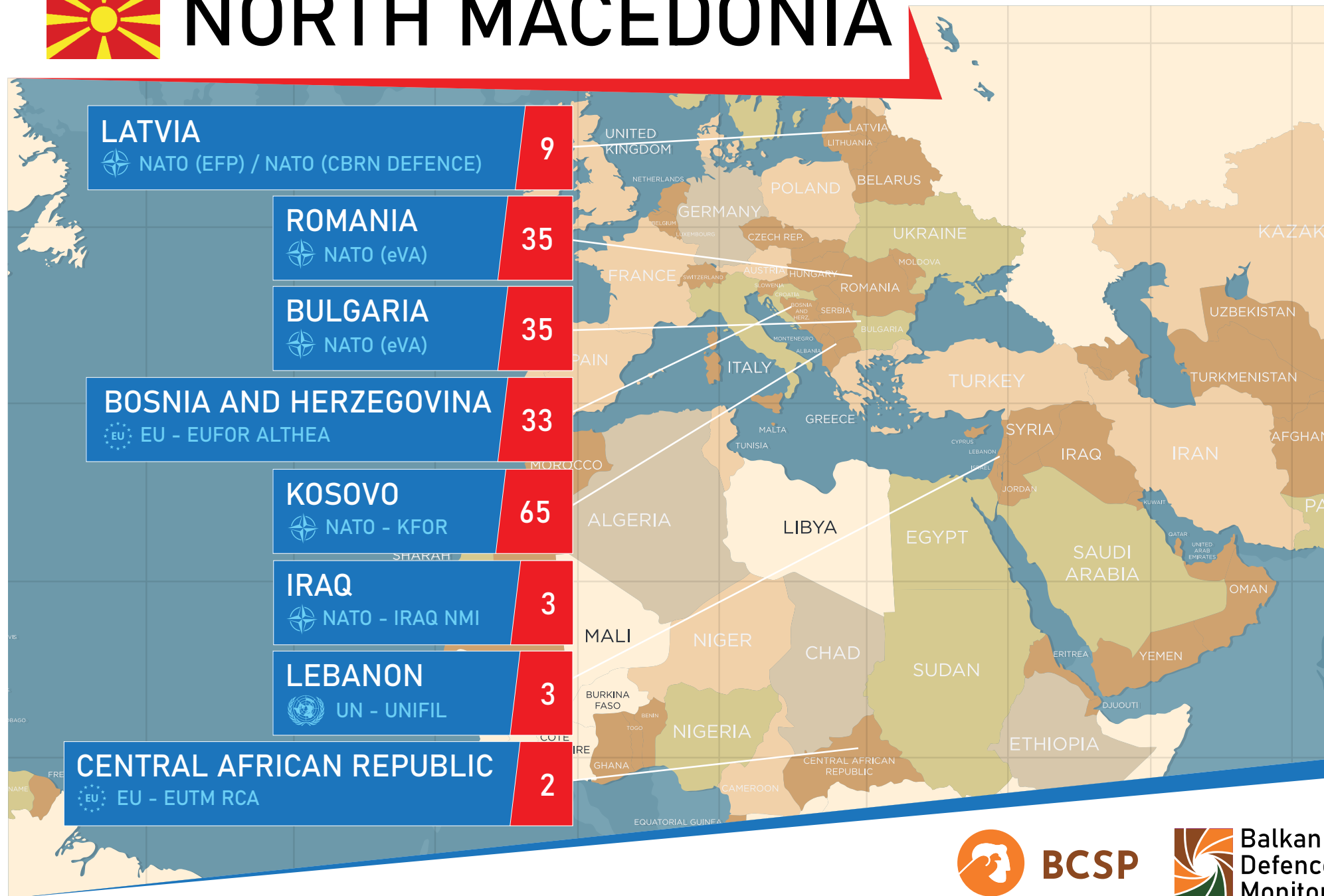
### TOP FOREIGN DONORS (2022)

UK

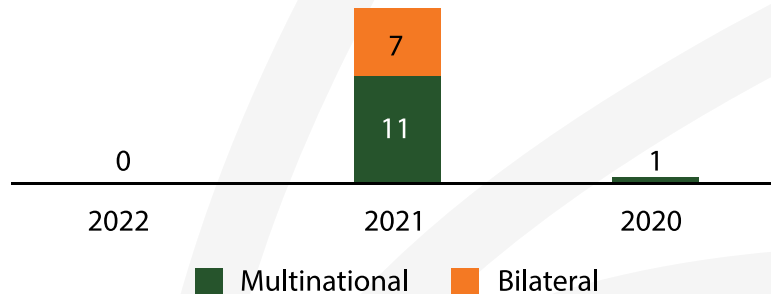
EUR 538,119



# NORTH MACEDONIA



## MILITARY EXERCISES



In 2022, the Serbian Armed Forces did not participate in any international exercises, either bilateral or multilateral. The reason for this was the decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia that the Armed Forces were to abort all activities related to planning, preparing and conducting exercises with foreign partners. This decision was a direct result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Before it was made, Serbia conducted exercises with both NATO and Russia, although always more with NATO members.

## DONATIONS

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

### TOP FOREIGN DONORS (2022)

South Eastern and Eastern Europe  
Clearinghouse

**EUR 4,215.70**





# SERBIA

