



Balkan 2024
**Defence
Monitor**

Transparency



BCSP
Belgrade Centre
for Security Policy

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,¹ 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.²

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 8th 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 2022.³

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.⁴

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.⁵

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.”

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 Turkey⁶ and Slovenia.⁷ The MoD also provides information on donations to Ukraine, which has been declassified.⁸

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.⁹

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.

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.¹⁰

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*

¹⁰ 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*¹¹ 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 5000.¹² The plan, presented by President Aleksandar Vučić, has received a lot of 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.¹³ 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.

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

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>