

EVIDENCE-BASED AND INTELLIGENCE-LED POLICING IN SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS CONTROL IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA – A Review of the National strategy for SALW control in accordance with the National action plan 2022–2024

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to present the efforts and commitment of the Republic of North Macedonia in the joint contribution toward peace and security, as stated in the Sofia Declaration from 2018 and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically in relation to the 16th of the sustainable development goals committed to peace, justice and strong institutions. The paper elaborates the prescribed activities for control of small arms and light weapons (SALW), emphasising the Action plan from the National Strategy for Small Arms and Light Weapons control of the Republic of North Macedonia 2022–2024, with the method of qualitative and quantitative review of the Goal 2 of the Strategy regarding the evidence-based and intelligence led policies and practices for SALW control.

The findings in this paper emphasize the observations of the declarative efforts, in particular in sub-goals 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 of the same Strategy, referring to their operationalization.

Through analysis of the implementation of relevant legislation and institutional practices for the prevention of the misuse of SALW, monitoring of crime related to SALW, improving national capacities and institutionalizing the analysis of firearms data with the introduction of the mandatory operational information framework, providing exchange of operational and strategic information, data, intelligence products, as well as evidence material, conduction of impact studies and operationalization and linkage with the national contact weapons point, thereby contributing to enhanced stability, security and development in Southeast and Eastern Europe.

The limitations of this paper are the lack of nationally available data for the successfulness of the implementation of the Strategy.

Keywords: small arms and light weapons, policing, strategy, intelligence, control, management.

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Introduction

The extensive use and abuse of weapons, especially small and light weapons, imposed the need for its legal regulation, and above all its definition. Small and light weapons play a significant role in various contexts, from military operations to law enforcement and criminal activities. Their portability, ease of use, and potential for misuse make them a subject of international concern, leading to efforts to regulate their trade and prevent their proliferation (Boutwell & Klare, 1999).

As prescribed in the 16th sustainable development goal (SDGs, also referred to as Global goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015), which specifies the imperative for peace, justice and strong institutions, gun violence and insecurity have a destructive impact on a country's development, affecting economic growth and often resulting in protracted social and security implications which can last for generations. The SDGs aim to significantly reduce all forms of violence and work with governments and communities in the undertakes to end conflict and insecurity (United Nations, 2022). Advancing the rule of law and human rights are key to this process, as well as reducing the flow of illicit weapons and strengthening the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance, in line with the 2030 Agenda (United Nations Development Programme, 2017).

The common terminology and language designating use of arms and ammunition in the diplomatic and operational environment had evolved over the previous decades. This process is in parallel with the UN Security Council's undertakes in numerous operations, management of weapons and ammunition issues and programs, as well as national, bilateral and multilateral arrangements, frameworks and practices for accepted obligations and responsibilities regarding the addressing of the arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament efforts in this particular realm (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2023).

In regard to evidence based and intelligence led policing in the aspect of small arms and light weapons control, with a review of the Republic of North Macedonia, the purpose of exchange of operational and strategic intelligence is in direction of further systematic deterrence and reduction of firearm-related threats domestically, regionally and internationally.

By applying the deductive method of research in the available domestic literature regarding the definition of SALW control, it refers primarily in the context on the need for implementation of the model for early warning and prevention in accordance with the UN Development program Macedonia (Georgieva, 2007). SALW control is defined in the aspect of tackling organized crime and national borders management, as well as its implications on regional security and the need for cooperation in conflict prevention in the Western Balkans (Pavleski, 2010).

Concerning evidence based and intelligence led policing in the aspect of small arms and light weapons control, the review of the available literature in the Republic of North Macedonia, points out to a gap in theoretical definition and empirical research on its implications and advantages.

The genesis of the concept of intelligence led policing framework is located in the Kent police (the Kent Policing Model) during the second half of the 20th century (Ratcliffe, 2008). Its evolution to a contemporary policing model continues in the first decades of the 21st century (Heaton, 2009).

Intelligence led policing is based on prioritizing tactical tasks and applying crime intelligence for strategic planning and forecasting emerging domains of criminality for the purpose of efficient resource allocation. It counterpoises an information sharing tool among various institutions designated to enforce law and maintain the several domains of security (Carter & Carter, 2009).

The intelligence-led policing process is taxonomically summarized in the steps of tasks planning, collection, evaluation, collation, processing, analysing, reporting, dissemination and feedback (OSCE Guidebook on Intelligence-Led Policing, 2017).

Subsequently, evidence based policing is defined as a notion relying on the principles of applying scientifically rigorous evaluations in evidence gathering and dissemination tactics, strategies and policies (Sherman, 2013).

Evidence based policing counterpoises a decision-making process, which integrates the best available evidence, professional judgement, and community values, preferences and circumstances (Sherman & Murray, 2015). It can be applied by all levels and department of policing and supports collaboration with other relevant institutions (beside the police) (Klose, 2024).

Evidence based policing is a variant of the standard, traditional model of policing characterized with a high level of discretion and low level of oversight (Welsh, Zane & Mears, 2024). It brings transparency in the decision making process and objectivity in conduct, which is essential for security systems undergoing reforms, such as the case with the Republic of North Macedonia (Bakreski, 2015).

Key Concepts

When it comes to the categorization of the notion of small arms and light weapons, there is no universally adopted definition of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in domestic and international professional literature (United Nations, 2008). It is generally accepted that the term SALW refers to weapons and ammunition with a calibre of less than 100 mm. This includes not only rifles, pistols and automatic weapons, but also mortars, anti-aircraft mortars (MANPADS), anti-armour rockets, conventional explosives and detonators. The United Nations' Selected Documents (2008) definition places SALWs into three categories:

Small arms: Revolvers and self-loading (semi-automatic) pistols; rifles and carbines; semi-automatic rifles (SMGs); offensive assault weapons (automatic weapons) and light machine guns (LMG); assaultive).

Light Weapons: Heavy Machine Guns (HMG); offensive mounted grenade launcher that mounts under the barrel of the rifle; portable anti-aircraft weapons; portable anti-armour weapons; recoilless weapon; portable launchers of anti-armour missiles and rocket systems; portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems and mortars (calibre less than 100 mm).

Ammunition and explosives: Bullets (frames) for small arms; light weapons grenades and projectiles; portable containers of single-use missiles or shells and anti-aircraft and anti-armour systems; anti-personnel and anti-armour grenades; landmines and explosives.

As for the term *proliferation*, it signifies an automatic and linear diffusion of an element in a system. In the security jargon, it implies the illicit trade and transit of small arms and light weapons, their components and ammunition across the territory of a state, as well as the development, production, acquisition and use of small arms and light weapons and

their use by authoritarian regimes, criminal terrorist groups or individuals in order to cause casualties and destroy material assets (Santoro, 2005).

According to the United Nations' Institute for Disarmament Research International Tracing Instrument (ITI, 2018:p.14) and the applicability of SDG indicator 16.4.2 to the operationalization of the ITI from 2018, small arms and light weapons would encompass any lethal weapon that could be carried by one person and which fires or discharges or is designed to fire or discharge or could be easily modified to fire or discharge a bullet, or a missile using the action of gunpowder gases including antique small arms and light weapons and their replicas. Antique small arms and light weapons and their replicas should be defined in accordance with domestic legislation and in no case, they should include weapons that were produced after 1899 (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2018). According to the 24th Ministerial Council meeting from the document of the OSCE measures from 2017, small arms and light weapons are a lethal instrument of war (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2017).

As described in the National Strategy for SALW Control and Action Plan 2022-2024, by a geographically sorted definition, in Southeast Europe, small arms and light weapons are defined as all lethal conventional weapons and ammunition that can be carried by an individual or a light vehicle and that do not require additional logistical support and maintenance facilities. The use and availability of illegal small arms and light weapons undermines the rule of law, poses a direct threat for violation of human rights increases the crime rate, affects the country's stability and is an obstacle to social and economic development (United Nations Security Council, 2021).

The control of small arms and light weapons refers to those activities that together aim to reduce the social, economic and environmental consequences of the uncontrolled proliferation and possession of small arms and light weapons. These include: control of border crossings, legislative and regulatory measures, strategies for raising public awareness of small arms and light weapons, activities for the collection and destruction of small arms and light weapons, information management and management of small arms and light weapons stockpiles and all other activities aimed at reducing the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (United Nations Security Council, 2023).

Chronological Overview and Evolution of the Efforts to Improve SALW Control through Cooperation and Information Exchange

The Republic of North Macedonia adopted the first Strategy for the control of small arms and light weapons in 2005, and during its implementation, the legal framework was largely harmonised with the relevant European standards and regulations (Grillot et al., 2004). Having in mind the post-conflict residues from the 1990-es wars as a result of the dissolving of the Yugoslav federation and the internal conflict of then the Republic of Macedonia, Illegal small and light weapons, ammunition and explosive materials have been easily accessible for several decades (Bienick & Mazur, 2012). They are mainly a remnant of the conflicts in the whole Western Balkans region. The risk of criminal use is high, and criminals use them in various types of events, such as protecting human trafficking routes, internecine conflicts, intimidation, as well as racketeering, etc. (National small arms and light weapons (SALW) control strategy and action plan 2017-2021 (revised version), 2018).

As a member of the UN, in the context and within the highlight of the Agenda 2030, the Republic of North Macedonia continuously undertakes activities to fulfil the obligations arising from the relevant conventions and other documents in the field of arms control and the non-proliferation of small arms and light weapons (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, 2022). In that direction, the Republic of North Macedonia takes over consistent efforts to fully implement several international documents in its domestic regulations. Among these are the Program of Action of the United Nations (2001a) and the OSCE document on small arms and light weapons (adopted in 2000 and reissued in 2012; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2000), The Protocol to Combat Illicit Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition Ratified by a United Nations Document A/CONF.192/15, New York, July 2001, The International Tracking Instrument (ITI) (United Nations, 2001b).

In response, the Government of the Republic of (North) Macedonia brought a Decision on the formation of the National Commission for Small and Light Weapons in 2007 complemented the United Nations Convention on Combating Transnational Organized Crime, 12/01/2005, the Arms Trade Treaty, ratified on 23/01/2014, etc.

Hence, the (then) Republic of Macedonia has also implemented the Council of the European Communities Directive 91/477/EEC of June 18, 1991 on the control of the acquisition and possession of weapons (1991) and the amendments with the Directive 2008/51/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2008 amending Council Directive 91/477/EEC on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons (2008).

In July, 2010, the Government of the (then) Republic of Macedonia passed a Decision on the adoption of the Common Position of the Council of the European Union 2008/944/CFSP for determining the common rules governing the control of the export of military technology and equipment (2008). This decision is embedded within the framework of the activities foreseen by the Action Plan 2017–2021, in compliance with Directive (EU) 2017/853 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017 amending Council Directive 91/477/EEC on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons (2017) amending Council Directive 91/477/EEC of 18 June 1991 on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons (1991).

Furthermore, in order to comply with the European regulation, in 2017, at the proposal of the National Commission for Small and Light Weapons, a working group was established with the aim of drafting new draft law, from which the two existing laws derived: the Law on traffic of explosive substances (2021) and the Law on protection from explosive substances from 2017.

The abovementioned laws are in compliance with the following directives: Commission Directive 2008/43/EC (2008) on establishing a system for the identification and traceability of explosives for civilian use; Commission Directive 2012/4/EU of February 22, 2012 amending Directive 2008/43/EC on the establishment of a system for the identification and monitoring of explosives for civilian use pursuant to Council Directive 93/15/EEC (Council of the European Union, 1993); Directive 2013/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 June 2013 on the harmonisation of the laws of the Member States relating to the making available on the market of pyrotechnic articles (recast) (2013).

The country is involved in international police cooperation activities through the main cooperation channels. Cooperation with Europol is ongoing after the conclusion of the

Strategic Agreement in 2007 and the Operational Agreement in 2011. There is an operational cooperation in the fight against human, arms and drug trafficking with the establishment of the network for the secure exchange of information (SIENA) where the Republic of North Macedonia has been recognised as an operational partner in the use of the channel, as well as the Europol's approach to OSINT (Open-source intelligence) investigations, financial investigations and handling weapons and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear substances and explosives used in terrorist attacks.

Control on SALW Proliferation in the Republic of North Macedonia

According to statistical data presented by the Small Weapons Survey, every third person in the Republic of North Macedonia possesses a firearm, out of which one-third is illegal (Small Arms Survey, 2023). The approximate number of firearms in civilian possession is 621,000, out of which 451,313 firearms are unregistered firearms of various types (Ministry of Finance, Customs Administration, 2023). According to the statement of the Minister of Interior, in spring 2023 there are 180,000 pieces of weapons registered on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia (Spasovska, 2023).

As a country of origin, transit and destination for firearms, North Macedonia has projected to harmonize its legislation for weapons control with the regulatory framework with the EU and other related international obligations, as a number one strategic goal of the National SALW Strategy and Action Plan (Cross-Border Integrated Institutional Approach Towards Combating Illicit Arms Trafficking (IAT) and Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) (United Nations North Macedonia, 2022a).

When it comes to directing, overseeing and analysing SALW control coordination on a national level in the Republic of North Macedonia, the designated body is the National Commission for Small and Light Weapons, established with a decision by the Government of the (then) Republic of Macedonia (Decision on the formation of the national commission for small and light weapons, 2007; 2019).

The composition of the National Commission for SALW is designated by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia and consists of members proposed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Defence; Ministry of Finance - Customs Administration of the Republic of North Macedonia; Ministry of Justice; Ministry of Education and Science; Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management; Ministry of Economy (Decision on the formation of the national commission for small and light weapons, 2019). According to the Decision on the appointment of the president, national contact person, members and secretary of the national commission for small and light weapons, the composition of the Commission consists of 22 members, from which 13 of the members come from the Mol of the RNM (180th Session of the Government, 22.08.2023). The Commission gives opinions and proposals on separate issues at the request of the Government and once a year submits a report on its work to the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The president of the National commission may invite representatives from other national institutions, international organizations and/or citizens' associations to join their regular working meetings if their expertise or knowledge is considered relevant to the cooperation. Meetings are held every other month in the calendar year, or as needed or at

the request of the members of the National Commission (Rules of Procedure of the SALW Commission, 2013).

The primary role of the National Commission for SALW Control, is to plan, coordinate and implement measures and activities for the control of SALW at the national level for the purpose of ensuring a safer environment and control over small and light weapons in society thus creating conditions for improving general security in the country. As coordination is one of the primary tasks of the National Commission for Small Arms and Light Weapons, which is an entity at the national level, it also provides advice, coordinates and monitors the implementation of the National Strategy for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons and the Action Plan (National small arms and light weapons (SALW) control strategy and action plan 2017–2021 (revised version), 2018).

The designated tasks of the National Commission for SALW include: identifying, determining and designating the impact of SALW on society, security and socio-economic development of the country; designation of priorities in the intervention for control of SALW and implementation of NAP; establishing and developing the operational measures of the intervention for control of SALW arising from goals; providing sufficient resources and mobilizing them wherever possible necessary for the implementation of the National Action Plan for SALW; approval of the detailed proposals for the SALW, intervention by all appropriate participants, notification of the measures taken and activities for SALW to the OSCE in accordance with the OSCE Document on SALW; implementation of the UN Action Program for prevention, combat and eradicating the illicit trade in SALW in all its aspects; the OSCE Document on SALW; the OSCE Document on the storage of conventional ammunition and any UN sanction and restrictive EU measure relating to the export of SALW; organizing work meetings, the dynamics of which is determined by the president of the National Commission for SALW; submission of annual report to the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia for its work and the progress made in relation to those implemented operational measures defined in the National Strategy and the Action Plan, including the legislative issues in support of the National Action Plan for SALW; coordinating the activities of all appropriate participants for support of the National Action Plan for SALW; providing timely information to all relevant participants about support of the National Action Plan; monitoring activities and evaluating measures of all components of measures and activities taken for SALW to support the National Action Plan for SALW; updating of the National Action Plan for SALW in accordance with the changed conditions and notification for the measures and activities undertaken for SALW to the Department of UN disarmament in accordance with the UN Plan of Action on SALW (Customs Administration, Ministry of Finance of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2023).

The focus of the designated tasks is aimed at the enforcement of the prevention and reduction of violence, increasing parliamentary commitment and oversight on the governmental decisions, understanding on SALW control and its influence. Not least, the tasks also emphasize the importance of gender equality, prevention and international cooperation in this field.

Current Development in Fight against SALW Proliferation

One of the commitments of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia is to carry out prevention, control of weapons, ammunition and explosives and eradication the proliferation of illegal weapons in accordance with regional and international initiatives, standards and documents for the control of weapons, ammunition and explosive substances (Patomaz za iznaogjanje ordživo rešenje za nezakonskoto poseduvanje, zloupotreba i trgovija so malo i lesno oružje (MLO), 2021). One of the most significant instruments on a regional level in this realm is the comprehensive platform for the jointly agreed indicators for the achieved results, which emphasizes the commitment required at the strategic, political and operational level between countries and complements the political commitments undertaken by the UN Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all of its aspects (United Nations, 2001a), as well as the legal obligation arising from the Protocol against illegal production and trade in firearms, components and spare parts and ammunition for the same (Firearms Protocol), translated into the Roadmap for finding an effective solution to the illegal possession, abuse and trade of small arms and light weapons (SALW)/firearms and ammunition for the same in the Western Balkans (United Nations MPTF Office Partners Gateway, 2023). Namely, the second highlighted goal of the Roadmap is to ensure that arms control policies and practices in Western Balkans will be evidence-based and intelligence-led by 2024 (Regional Narrative Progress Report on the Implementation of the Roadmap, 2021).

On a national level, currently, the most significant effort is set by the Strategy for SALW and Action Plan 2022-2024, with its second goal, which designates that by 2024, it will ensure that arms control policies and practices are evidence-based and intelligence-driven (European Commission, 2022).

Particularly, this goal has set the emphasis on strengthening the capacity for intelligence-led policy work on illegal firearms possession/IAT, respectively applying an intelligence-led policing approach to firearms-related crime. The particular activities for this strategic goal are:

- to introduce a mandatory operational information framework and
- finalization of the Police Information System (IMS), its operationalization and connection with the National Weapons Point.

Goals 2.3 and 2.4, as provided in the Strategy for SALW and AP 2022-2024, are related to providing an exchange of operational and strategic information, data, intelligence products, as well as evidence materials with Europol, Frontex, Eurojust and Interpol. This, in particular, presupposes encircling the national contact point and the formation of a working group. This body counterpoises the central unit for the collection and analysis of information, in support of investigators and prosecutors and enable the creation and updating of an intelligence picture of arms trafficking from and through SEE. These specified activities are in jurisdiction of the International Police Cooperation Department within the MoI of the RNM.

The particular activities related to this strategic goal are:

- analysis of the possibility of inclusion in a regionally agreed mandatory exchange of data for all users in the Western Balkans, which will enable the improvement of proactive investigations at the national, regional and international level; and

- implementation of a regionally agreed procedure for the exchange of ballistic information (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2022).

This goal from the Strategy for SALW and Action plan is additionally reinforced with the sub-goal designated for strengthening of cooperation and participation in relevant training centres of regional and international character. This presupposes participation at regional and international conferences and seminars in the area of small and light weapons, as well as explosives and precursors, which presupposes activities related to:

- regular contribution to regional processes and mechanisms, within the framework of the Roadmap, SEELEN, Small Arms and Light Weapons Commission, National Weapons Point, RACVIAC, EMPACT and others;
- participation in EMPACT Arms Trafficking Operational Action Plan (OAPs); and
- participation in relevant operational actions participation in specific trainings, such as SEESAC, CEPOL, etc.

The following sub goal dedicated to small and light weapons Strategy is set to ensure compliance with reporting requirements, in accordance with the various agreements with regional and international organizations in the areas of arms control, with specific activities related to:

- notification through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the UN, OSCE, ATT and other related international instruments;
- reporting on progress in implementing the Roadmap for a Sustainable Solution to Illegal possession, abuse and trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and their ammunition in Western Balkans until 2024;
- implementation of reporting on arms exports; and
- notification to UNODC regarding the UN Illicit Flows Questionnaire (UN-IAFQ).

The subsequent sub goal is focused on improving capacities and capabilities to mark, find and record for small and light weapons, explosives and explosive precursors, which is followed by these concrete activities which are currently in a process of implementation:

- implementation of the new software for registering firearms and issuing firearm licenses to legal and natural persons, as well as establishing a computerised system for registration of import, export and transit licenses, as well as an online fire monitoring system, weapons in the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia, including the warehouses of firearms, and weapons of legal entities (WRMS);
- provision of tracking of lost and stolen firearms through INTERPOL's iARMS and yes prepare SOP for monitoring report;
- development of software for the control of explosives, including the possibility of monitoring (tracing);
- drawing up a system of licensing explosive precursors and documenting suspicious transfers;
- purchase of a marking machine, for marking during import and deactivation and related training; and
- participation in serial number renewal training.

Further in the taxonomy of the sub goals related to the strategic goal is for the Institutionalizing the systematic collection of criminal-legal data by the police and customs administration, the prosecution, courts and penal institutions with activities described as:

- establishment of a working group on firearms crime data collected under the Illegal Flows of Arms Questionnaire – IAFQ;
- agreement on a common methodology for the collection of data on firearms crime in order to improve the process of responding to the Illicit Flows of Arms Questionnaire – IAFQ; and
- conducting a study to evaluate court practices regarding firearms crime.

The strategic goal and its sub goals foresee the activity for establishing a data collection system in all relevant institutions regarding the effects of fire weapons and their distribution, through developing a database for the weapons, designate contact point(s) and identifying relevant databases that can provide data and a creation of a draft SOP for data collection on gun crime, and establishing a mechanism for the participation of relevant gender mechanisms (such as representatives of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and civil society organizations working on gender equality and gender-based violence in the development of policies for the control of small arms and light weapons (Alpers & Wilson, 2022).

From these concrete directions, specific activities arise, such as the 2022 project named Cross-Border Integrated Institutional Approach Towards Combating Illicit Arms Trafficking (IAT) and Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) supported by the UNDP, where a total of 80 police officers from North Macedonia's and Kosovo's jurisdictions were trained in information gathering, information sharing and information analysis as well as on weapon categorization, explosives, community policing and intelligence-led policing, with the aim at strengthening the capacities of border police, patrolling officers and community police in combatting illicit arms trafficking (Western Balkans SALW Control Roadmap MPTF, 2020).

When it comes to the General Staff and the contribution toward the control of the small and light weapon non-proliferation, in accordance with the Annual plan of the Ministry of Defence, it has resources from the budget allocated for the Compliance with norms at the convention for non-proliferation of small and light weapons, for the purposes of SEESAC cooperation in the form of annual meetings and coordination, with the Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons as a baseline, in the context of Sub-programme 1.5, designated for International activities (bilateral, regional, multilateral).

This forecasted and implemented activity stems from, and in accordance with the Law on Defence (Defence Law, 2001, 2003), and the 2003 Conception for security and defence, which counterpoises the fundamental document of the Republic of North Macedonia in the field of security and defence (Pretsedatel, 2023).

In this direction, based upon the organizational structure of the General staff, the J-2 sector for intelligence, counterintelligence and security is designated for the protection of the territorial integrity, independence and wider interests of the Republic. It also gathers, analyses and produces intelligence, required for participation with declared forces in NATO-led peace support and conflict prevention operations and provides intelligence support to humanitarian and peace support operations in dealing with natural disasters and humanitarian crises (Assembly of the Republic of (North) Macedonia, 2003).

As for the engagement of the legislative segment, the Parliamentary Defence and Security Commission has a significant role through its engagement in regional high-level meetings on small arms and light weapons as well. In their capacity as representatives of the Commission for Defence and Security from the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia,

they are actively participating in the Regional Meeting at a high level for small and easy weapons (SALW) in preventing and reducing violence. The aim is to improve implementation through parliamentary action with capacity building, policy making and awareness raising, as well as strengthening security processes of cooperation and prevention, including in decision making. The results and lessons learned are expected to reach a wider international audience in relevant international forums (Defence and Security Commission at a regional high-level meeting on small arms and light weapons) (Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2023).

Future Projection in Fight against SALW Proliferation – Forecasted Results and Improvement

Evidence-based and intelligence-led policing in small arms and light weapons control is based upon mutually agreed principles. The institutions involved agree to the following principles:

- need for effective interagency cooperation and effective information sharing is a key pillar of this cooperation. Each institution receives and/or controls information that may be useful to the investigation it involves SALW control;
- requirement for timely responses to requests from other organizations and all relevant institutions are prepared to undertake obligations in this regard. Investigations involving the joint activities of multiple agencies require coordination;
- collaboration processes should be as efficient as possible to be used in the greatest number of appropriate cases and in particular the existence of these processes should not impede existing collaboration between agencies;
- accession and sharing of data by the institutions in accordance with the existing legal provisions and in accordance with the demands for data protection;
- response to urgent information requests after the receiving of another institutions' demand related to an inquiry. Urgent requests need to be labelled as such by the institution requesting the information and should include a disclaimer which points out the urgency;
- consideration of the appropriate forms of cooperation during an investigation by the prosecution for every case specifically which may include forming a working group, recurring meetings and other forms of cooperation or forming investigating teams in accordance with Article 50 from the Law on criminal conduct;
- need for an operative coordination in investigations in which several institutions and agencies are included with numerous parallel activities, by which all the activities are enforced by previously designated guidelines with regular reports disposals among police, army, intelligence agencies, prosecution and other involved subjects (Bakreski et al., 2021).

The listed principles are adequate and realistic, still there are several challenges identified. For example, the effectiveness of the mechanisms for the application of intelligence-led policing in practice, depends, to a large extent, on the individual motivation of the officers and on their willingness to submit reports in a timely manner, so the analytical function

can be performed, without data containment in the reports. This precondition also requires significant cooperation and coordination between prosecutors and investigators, especially when it comes to sharing operational information (Guidelines on Establishing a Weapon Contact Point in RNM, South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), 2019).

In practice, in the case of the Republic of North Macedonia, the taxonomically noted principles for intelligence sharing presupposes are being practically translated into the realization of several activities as a concept of sustains. These include the creation of a new Police Information System, the upgrade of the Electronic Register of Weapons and specialised training for police officers; the capacities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs are being increased in the past several years for easier monitoring of legally and illegally owned weapons in the country, etc. These activities were carried out as part of the project "Improving national practices for the control of small arms and light weapons and building resilient communities" whereas more than 350 police officers were trained to use the abovementioned systems. The project was implemented by UNDP with the financial support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany and have improved the capacities and their efficiency in quick and structured information for the weapons, as emphasized by the resident representative of the UNDP for the RNM, Mr. Armen Grigoryan. (United Nations North Macedonia, 2022b).

In addition, as a forecast of further improvement, the National Coordination Centre for Combating Organised Crime is operational but needs to improve its operational capacity. It is significant to highlight that its activity contributed to shortening the time of exchange of data and information for the needs of the involved institutions by sharing information between institutions according to the "need to know" principle. It improved coordination between institutions in cases where there is a request for data and information for the same targeted natural or legal person; as well as support for international exchange of information, especially in the area of international police cooperation, which is an important segment in the fight against organised and serious crime. All participating authorities have access to their databases, and all have appointed a representative.

The limitations identified in this research are located in the lack of sufficient specialised human and financial resources and adequate equipment for proper operation, as well as a proactive approach in monitoring cases, such as the investigative centres in the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Skopje, Kumanovo and Tetovo and in the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecution of Organised Crime and Corruption in achieving their goals of increasing the efficiency of investigations and improving coordination between prosecutors, the police and other relevant authorities.

Findings

As prescribed in the National strategy for SALW control and in accordance with the National action plan 2022–2024 of the Republic of North Macedonia, the concrete operational aspect applies to those activities which jointly strive to reduce the social and economic consequences of uncontrolled proliferation and possession of small and light weapons (such as the prevention of the use of SALW in domestic violence, the gender-based aspect of the use of SALW, etc.).

The operationalization in particular includes legislative and regulatory measures, strategies for raising public awareness about SALW (such as the preventive campaign "Celebrate with your heart, not your weapon" as part of the operative plan of the MoI titled "Safe summer 2022"), activities for collection and destruction of SALW, management of information and management of SALW stocks and all other related activities aimed at reducing proliferation of SALW (Customs Administration, Ministry of Finance of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2023; control of border crossings (such as the project "A cross-border integrated institutional approach to the fight against the illegal trade in arms and small arms and light weapons"), which are quantitatively depicted in a chronological review from 2015 to 2022 in Tables 1, 2, and 3. The trends in SALW crime rate after the enforcement of the National Action Plan derived from the National Strategy for SALW control in the Republic of North Macedonia 2022-2024 are in the stage of statistical processing.

Table 1: Illegal Weapons Discovered at Border Crossings of the Republic of North Macedonia

Seized quantities of weapons, ammunition and explosives			
Type/Year	2020	2019	2018
Pistols/Revolvers	63/10	76/8	86/7
Rifles (automatic/hunting rifles/gas)	14/36/10	6/35/0	11/24/3
Machine guns/Grenade launchers	/	/	1/1
Hand grenades	14	10	6
Ammunition in pieces	7,180	45	596
Mines	/	1	1

source: Ministry of Interior Affairs (2025)

Table 2: Seized Weapons in the Territory of the Republic of North Macedonia

Seized quantities of weapons, ammunition and explosives			
Type/Year	2017	2016	2015
Pistols and revolvers	100	59	106
Various types of guns	53	59	125
Other pieces of weapons	37	17	13
Ammunition	9,718	4,995	22,792
Explosive in kilograms	/	0.6	0.8

source: Ministerstvo za vnatreni raboti (2025)

Table 3: Seized Weapons in 2022 in the Territory of the Republic of North Macedonia

Automatic rifles	Hunting rifles	Small calibre rifles	Pistols	Revolvers	Hand grenades	Rocket launchers	Bullets
Machine guns	Hunting carabiners						Projectiles
2	34	4	73	2	3	1	4781
2	8						7

source: Ministerstvo za vnatreni raboti (2025)

In terms of small arms and light weapons, there are visible results with 328 firearms seized in 2021. In the same year, 178 crimes of illegal production, possession and trade in weapons were discovered, for which 195 perpetrators were criminally punished. In 2022, the police of the Republic of North Macedonia submitted criminal charges to the Prosecutor's Office for 210 perpetrators of crimes related to the illegal possession of weapons (Global Public Policy Institute, 2023).

Conclusion

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is often the catalyst that transforms localised incidents into global challenges. For this purpose, global and national activities, together with well-coordinated national and regional cooperation of all law enforcement agencies, in strengthening control over the production and trade of arms, building standards for the development of effective monitoring systems, are of exceptional importance. The Republic of North Macedonia, given its geographical position, its political stance and institutional capacity maximizes its efforts in tackling the issue of proliferation of small and light weapons.

The concrete efforts presuppose exchange of information among relevant institutions, conduct transparency, sharing of best practices, as well as raising public awareness through the implementation of programs to promote and support the reduction and control of weapons at all stages of public education.

All these efforts for connecting the global agenda for disarmament, along with concepts such as gender mainstreaming, including gender-based violence etc., develop the future path for a coherent, holistic and effective response on a global, regional and national level and will/would bring (optimally) minimization or (ideally) eradication of violence, in accordance with the Sustainable development goals and the 2030 Agenda.

Based on the OECD criteria – relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability, in line with the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development goals of the UN – in the case of the Republic of North Macedonia, the designated framework for SALW control proves itself sufficient yet there are still adjustments to be made. The quantitative results of the efforts in this direction so far, are empirically measured by concrete indicators of success. These indicators are:

- the functional establishment of Contact points for firearms,
- the number of cases of inter-institutional cooperation at the operational level, including the investigation phases, prosecution and preliminary procedure, number of cases of operational cooperation arising from intelligence including ballistic intelligence in the fight against firearm-related crimes involving authorities in the region, Member States and EU agencies as well as international law enforcement authorities,
- number of incidents involving firearms and victims of firearm abuse by gender and age in each of the Western Balkan countries,
- number of voluntarily surrendered firearms, ammunition and explosives as well as legalised or deactivated firearms, number of reported SALW, ammunition and explosives confiscated and/or surplus systematically destroyed, etc.,

- number of facilities for the storage of SALW and ammunition that are in accordance with international safety and security standards,
- the qualitative measurement of security as of percentage of citizens' satisfaction or feeling of safety in relation to gun violence not only on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia, but in the entire Western Balkans.

In regard of the evidence-based and intelligence led policing in SALW control, in accordance with the strategic goals for the implementation of SALW and combat against illegal proliferation and prevention of armed incidents in civil and military use prescribed in the National strategy for SALW control (National small arms and light weapons (SALW) control strategy and action plan 2017-2021 (revised version), 2018) supported by SEESAC and UNDP, the concrete undertakes involve organizing regular coordination meetings of the National Commission every six months to present the progress according to the objectives of the Roadmap and participation in regional coordination meetings with other representatives from the national commissions for the control of SALW from the countries of the Western Balkans. These strategic goals are based upon the principle for exchange of experiences and good practice, division of responsibilities at all levels and an integrated approach accepted by all stakeholders in the field of arms control.

Subsequently, the National strategy for SALW control foresees finalization of the Police Information System (IMS), its operationalization and connection with the national weapons point and integration in bases such as WRMS, CEMS, IMS as well as implementation of a mandatory framework for operative information; and application of an intelligence-led policing approach to firearms-related crime (National small arms and light weapons (SALW) control strategy and action plan 2017-2021 (revised version), 2018).

All of the above are designated activities in direction of the Goal 2 of the National strategy for SALW control in direction of Strengthening capacity for intelligence-led policy work on illegal firearms possession/IAT and providing exchange of operational and strategic information, data, intelligence products, as well as evidence materials with Europol, Frontex, Eurojust and Interpol (National small arms and light weapons (SALW) control strategy and action plan 2017-2021 (revised version), 2018).

All of the elaborated activities in accordance with the strategic goals of the Action plan of the National strategy for SALW control in the Republic of North Macedonia are in line with targets of the SDG goal 16, which refer for significant reduction of illegal financial flows and arms trade as well as Target 16.a which calls for the strengthening of the relevant national institutions for capacity building at all levels, especially in developing countries for the prevention of violence and the fight against terrorism and crime, including through international cooperation (United Nations, 2022).

The scrutiny of the ambit, the systematic examination of information to identify potential threats, risks, new problems and opportunities will further enable better preparedness and inclusion of mitigation processes and utilization in the policy-making process and developing a sustainable approach, in accordance with the Sustainable development goals of the UNDP, with an emphasis on the goal number 16 concerning peace, justice and strong institutions (Law amending and supplementing the Law on weapons, 2022).

Yet, based on findings obtained with a semi structured interview with members of the National Commission on SALW control in the RNM, the undertaken efforts are quantitatively average and qualitatively declarative and more needs to be done from the aspect of information

sharing (intelligence led policing) and systematic analysis of data (evidence based policing) in order to connect the legislative and normative prescriptions with the actual results on the field.

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