



Introduction

This report is a Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Survey of the Republic of Bulgaria, conducted in accordance with a set of guidelines developed by the South Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small and Light Weapons (SEESAC), in co-operation with the non-governmental research organisation, the Small Arms Survey.¹ These guidelines determined the scope, method and objectives of the research, a fact that is reflected in this report. The report details research findings in relation to four thematic areas:

- **Small Arms Distribution Survey (SADS)**, which investigates the distribution of small arms across Bulgaria.
- **Small Arms Impact Survey (SAIS)**, which examines the impact of SALW on the human environment, specifically by looking at armed crime and the impact on individuals, communities and the state.
- **Small Arms Perception Survey (SAPS)**, which assesses the views of the public in relation to SALW in their communities.
- **Small Arms Capacity Survey (SACS)**, which examines the capacity of institutions for dealing with small arms problems.

Having been spared the conflict and instability that affected its Western Balkan neighbours during the 1990s, Bulgaria has not had to grapple with anything like the resulting proliferation of SALW that occurred there. Typical indicators such as the absolute number of weapons in the country, the incidence of armed violence, and levels of ethnic tension raise little cause for concern.

SALW issues are, however, highly relevant in Bulgaria. Many of the challenges the country currently faces can be traced back to the Communist era, when Bulgaria maintained a large standing army and the defence industry was a mainstay of the national economy. The political and economic reforms that a transition away from Communism required proved difficult to see through, particularly in the early 1990s. Simultaneous changes to the structure and workings of the defence industry, security forces and national administration resulted in a weak arms export control system, a growing number of surplus SALW and a progressive downsizing of the SALW production industry. All of this occurred against a backdrop of increasing physical and economic insecurity for the country's citizens.

From around 1998, the overall political and economic situation in Bulgaria gradually stabilised. Membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was achieved in March 2003, and with recent European Union (EU) reports commending the reforms undertaken to date, EU accession is now expected in early 2007. This report provides an overview of the extent to which Bulgaria has successfully overcome its past SALW problems, and the challenges that still remain. This report is the first of its kind in Bulgaria to offer a comprehensive picture of the SALW situation in Bulgaria (including weapons production, distribution and impact, as well as data on public perceptions and national capacities to control SALW). In the run-up to EU accession it is to be hoped that all those concerned with SALW control in Bulgaria and the South Eastern European region can make good use of the report's findings to refine and target their efforts appropriately.

¹ Specifically, Regional Micro Disarmament Standard 05.80 and SALW survey protocols 1, 2 and 3.



Box 1: Methodology

A number of different methods were used to gather information for this report. These included a nationwide household survey (HHS), focus group discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews with 'key informants', and a review of secondary sources.

- More than forty key informants were interviewed by the researchers over a period of months. They included staff from the key national SALW control agencies within the Ministries of Defence, Economy, Interior and Foreign Affairs; employees from international organisations; and a number of journalists and non-governmental activists working within the country (see Annex G for a list of interviewees).
- In addition to research reports available on the subject, news reports from Bulgaria's national TV stations (BTV, New Television and Bulgarian National TV) and all national daily and weekly newspapers for the previous year were analysed. A full bibliography is provided in Annex H.
- A nationwide household survey, capturing 1,251 respondents (48.1 percent female, 51.9 percent male) aged 15 years and over, was a central component of the research. A two-stage random cluster sample was used for the survey, drawing on the entire adult population of Bulgaria. An English-language translation of the household survey questionnaire, selected data tables and data file are available online.²
- Six focus group discussions were carried out around the country from 5 to 12 July 2004 with key social groups in the towns of Sofia, Varna, Kazanlak, Kyrdzhali and Gotse Delchev (see Annex A).
- While a substantial amount of the data included in this report was generated during the five-month research period, official statistics, whether from government ministries, hospitals or independent bodies such as the National Statistical Institute, were an important information source.

² See the websites of either Saferworld, <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/publications/europe_ebalkans.htm>, SEESAC, <<http://www.seesac.org/reports/surveys.htm>> or Center for the Study of Democracy, <<http://www.csd.bg/en/euro/arms.php>>.