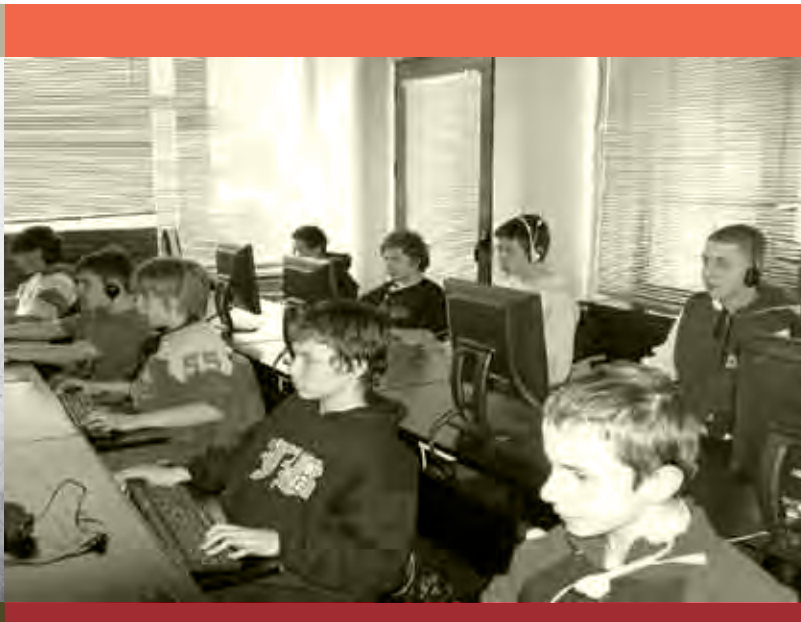




# **‘The rifle has the devil inside’ Gun Culture in South Eastern Europe**



**SEESAC**

South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse  
for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons



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The **South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons** (SEESAC) has a mandate from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Stability Pact for South East Europe (SCSP) to further support all international and national stakeholders by strengthening national and regional capacity to control and reduce the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons, and thus contribute to enhanced stability, security and development in South Eastern and Eastern Europe.

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**'The rifle has the devil inside,' Gun Culture in South Eastern Europe, SEESAC, May 2006**

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BICC	Bonn International Centre for Conversion
CSD	Centre for the Study of Democracy
DPA	Democratic Party of Albanians
ENA	Environmental National Agency
FBiH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
HFS	Hunters and Fishermen Society
HHS	Household Survey
IMIR	International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations
IMRO	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization
KPC	Kosovo Protection Corps
KPS	Kosovo Police Service
LCESFA	Law on the Control of Explosive Substances, Firearms and Ammunition
MoD	Ministry of Defence
OCG	Organized Criminal Groups
OHR	Office of the High Representative
PSC	Private Security Company
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SEE	South Eastern Europe
SEESAC	South Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of SALW
UNODC	UN Office on Drugs and Crime
VMRO-DPMNE	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party of the Macedonian National Unity
WRC	Weapons Registration Cards
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II



## Executive Summary

SALW control stakeholders and practitioners within South Eastern Europe (SEE) are often told that weapon registration and collection programmes are ineffective because guns are an intrinsic part of 'cultures' in the region. In addition, international and local observers often explain high levels of gun ownership and use in SEE by stating there is a strong 'gun culture'. In contrast, survey results on the public's perception of guns, suggest that 'culture' and 'tradition' are not principal reasons for gun ownership in the region. Thus, it is a matter of continued debate to what extent and which types of gun ownership and use are rendered acceptable and legitimate by certain cultural beliefs and practices.

This report examines how cultural beliefs and practices influence gun ownership and use in SEE, and how these might affect SALW control interventions. An anthropological approach was taken to better understand the reasons for civilian gun ownership and use, and the ways in which society represents these behaviours, in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Serbia and Montenegro (including the UN Administered Territory of Kosovo). A wide variety of research tools were used including household surveys (HHS) conducted by SEESAC and UNDP, focus group transcripts, secondary literature searches, statistical data, anthropological field studies, the Internet, print and electronic media.

The report concludes that the motivations and reasons for gun ownership and use in SEE are complex and suggests that cultural practices and beliefs do not play a central role in justifying gun ownership and use in SEE. There are pockets of culturally motivated gun related behaviours, in very localised areas, which have historical roots, such as celebratory gunfire in the mountainous areas of the peninsula (parts of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Northern Albania). However, more important are the ways that 'traditional' customs and values have interplayed with other factors such as the political or socio-economic situation, or the 1990s conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. People's behaviours involving guns, and their perceptions of guns, are more to do with the relatively widespread availability of weapons, weak and ineffective law enforcement and the reinvention of history and folklore for political means. Over the years guns have been associated with masculinity and have been a means of defining male attributes but they are not so significant now for ideas of masculinity although gun related activities remain male-oriented. The way guns are represented today, and how society perceives them is largely influenced by the media and how it portrays gun owners and gun use, especially the actions of high profile organizations or individuals who are associated with guns, such as the police, politicians and prominent businesspeople.

In general, 'traditional' and 'cultural' motivations for gun ownership and use in SEE are unlikely to be the principal barriers to SALW control interventions. Security considerations are much more likely to play a significant role with many people unwilling to give up their weapons, which they perceive as providers of security and protection, until they are satisfied that the state can be trusted to provide for their needs. Whilst there are still relatively high crime levels, the unresolved status of territory i.e. the UN Administered Territory of Kosovo, uncertain futures and interethnic distrust (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Southern Serbia and to some extent in Montenegro and Moldova) there will be people who feel that they are justified in keeping their guns.

It is important to note that this report is the first of its kind to be conducted in SEE, or even globally (to our knowledge). The research team acknowledge that it will have inevitable shortcomings due to constraints such as limited time for research and production and a lack of available information. However, it is a valuable springboard for further research into the linkages between guns and culture, and their interplay with other factors in SEE such as the political and social context.



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## 1 Introduction

Civilians own and use guns for a variety of reasons, including personal security, protection of property, criminal activities and sport and leisure activities. Why people own and use guns is not static or homogenous, it will vary according to age, gender and status, and depend on variables such as the socio-economic, political, cultural, historical and geographical situation. Sometimes guns are owned and used because of a symbolic shared meaning they have for a group of people (for example as a symbol of status, masculinity or honour), particularly on specific occasions. But it is a matter of continued debate to what extent and which types of gun ownership and use are rendered acceptable and legitimate by certain cultural beliefs and practices.

Despite recent hostilities and armed conflicts, there is a widespread assumption that the high presence of weapons in SEE is due to the strong cultural-historical roots of guns in the region. Advocates of voluntary weapons collections are frequently told they will be unsuccessful because guns are an intrinsic part of cultures in the region. In addition, international and local observers often explain high gun ownership and use in SEE by stating there is a strong 'gun culture'. However, 'gun culture' is not an uncontested and self-explanatory term, as some presume; it is often banded about without justification.<sup>1</sup>

These views are challenged by results of a survey on the public's perceptions of guns, which suggest that 'culture' and 'tradition' is not a principal reason for gun ownership in the region. Except in Montenegro where 21.8% of respondents believed that 'tradition' was the main reason people owned guns in their local area.<sup>2</sup> In other countries or territories in the region, only 1% to 5% of respondents cited 'tradition' as the most common reason for gun possession, opting for reasons of personal or property protection instead.<sup>3</sup> Currently there is no systematic research to substantiate claims that 'culture' or 'tradition' inhibits SALW control interventions in the region.

This study is based on the premise that culture is not static but is constantly evolving and changing and it is not just a product of past traditions but develops and is reinterpreted as society changes. This report will focus on 'culture' to mean a society's particular set of values, norms – both social and legal – and meanings that render an action or thought acceptable and legitimate.<sup>4</sup> Guns are not separable from the cultural environment in which they are acting and this means that the prevailing norms and values that render certain gun ownership and use acceptable must be understood within a geographical, political, historical and socio-economic context. 'Gun culture' lacks an established definition and is subject to continued debate, so this report will take 'gun culture' to be the cultural acceptance of gun ownership in situations where the principal motivation or justification for it is not for utilitarian or economic reasons but because their society has a set of values and norms that deem it acceptable behaviour. A simple example would be when a man carries a gun, primarily not for hunting or for protection, but because his 'culture' interprets his behaviour as a sign of masculinity and status.

<sup>1</sup> For example Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty in a report said that Kosovo, like much of the Balkans, was 'home to an age-old gun culture,' in 'UN Launches Third Arms Roundup in Kosova,' RFE / RL Newslines, Vol. 7, No. 153, 13 August 2003, at <<http://www.rferl.com/newslines/2003/08/4-SEE/see-130803.asp>>. *Jane's Defence Weekly* made a similar reference to the 'traditional gun culture of the Balkans,' which was particularly strong among ethnic Albanians, making it 'almost a prerequisite that every head of the family should possess a firearm,' in 'How Many Weapons in Macedonia?', posted on 25 August 2001, at <<http://www.freerepublic.com/forum/a3b884c0f0a34.htm>>. One of the conclusions made at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) seminar, held in Sofia, Bulgaria, on 11 - 12 November 2002 was that 'it can be said that the facilitated and illicit access to SALW has the potential to warp any type of peaceful resolution of a conflict, as it becomes the only instrument and deterrent of resolving political, economic and social problems, thus creating what is known as 'Gun Culture', in *Consolidated Summary of the First Preparatory Seminar for the Eleventh Economic Forum - National and International Economic Impact of Trafficking in SALW*, OSCE, Vienna, 03 December 2002, p. 21, at <[http://www.osce.org/documents/sg/2002/12/46\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/sg/2002/12/46_en.pdf)>. See also: *Albania's gun culture proves hard to shift*, BBC News, 15 January 2003, at <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/2660853.stm>>; 'Sights set on gun culture,' *Worcester News*, at <[http://www.thisisworcestershire.co.uk/worcestershire/worcester/news/WEN\\_NEWS\\_FEATURES\\_KOSOVO8.html](http://www.thisisworcestershire.co.uk/worcestershire/worcester/news/WEN_NEWS_FEATURES_KOSOVO8.html)>; 'Macedonia: Peace month, 21 September - 30 October 2005,' International Action Network on Small Arms, at <<http://www.iansa.org/regions/europe/macedonia-peace-month.htm>>.

<sup>2</sup> Florquin & Stoneman, 'A house isn't a home without a gun' - *SALW Survey of Republic of Montenegro*, SEESAC, Belgrade, 2004, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Grillot et al, *A Fragile Peace: Guns and Security in post-conflict Macedonia*. SEESAC, Belgrade, 2004, Annex E: Household Survey, responses to selected questions, Question 19, p. 86; Paes et al. *Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey - Bosnia and Herzegovina*. UNDP, Sarajevo, July 2004, pp. 32-49; Rynn et al. *Taming the Arsenal - Small Arms and Light Weapons in Bulgaria*. SEESAC, Belgrade, 2005, p. 54; Taylor et al. *Living with the Legacy - SALW Survey of Republic of Serbia*. SEESAC, Belgrade, 2005, p. 37; Khakee & Florquin, *Kosovo and Gun: Baseline Assessment of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Kosovo*. Small Arms Survey / UNDP, Geneva, June 2003, Annex 1: Question 18, p. 48; SEESAC, *Public Perceptions of Small Arms and Security in South Serbia*. SEESAC, Belgrade, 2004, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> 'Gun Culture' in Kosovo: Questioning the Origins of Conflict in *Small Arms Survey 2005* p. 205.



The report is comprised of several parts: this introductory section, a historical analysis of gun ownership and use, an overview of current gun ownership and use to examine the social and legal framework which supports it, a section that looks at the way society represents guns (including the gun as a symbol), and a concluding section and annexes containing relevant documents and additional information.

## 2 Purpose of the report

The purpose of this report is to examine how cultural beliefs and practices influence gun ownership and use in SEE, and how these will affect SALW control interventions. Some forms of gun ownership and use will be culturally acceptable and legally legitimate. Others may be illegal, but society deems them acceptable because of its 'culture'. It is these illegal but culturally acceptable beliefs and practices, which are most likely to hinder SALW control interventions. In order to identify them and the reasons why they are culturally accepted it is necessary to: understand how the past, including myths, folklore and traditions, has impacted on people's current perceptions of guns; what current gun activities exist and how they are rendered legitimate; and how guns are represented in mainstream society i.e. by the media and in popular culture.

Thus the main questions the report aims to answer are:

- How does history and tradition influence the way guns are perceived in SEE today?
- What gun related behaviours are rendered acceptable by society and why; especially ones which are also illegal?
- How does mainstream society represent guns and how does it reproduce guns as symbols? Does it reinforce culturally acceptable images of guns?
- What implication do these findings have for SALW control interventions and policymaking?

Whilst this report attempts to give a clearer and more detailed understanding of the 'cultural' influences that motivate gun ownership and use in the region, its usefulness lies in its operational application when designing SALW control interventions. This report aims to aid SALW control practitioners modify their SALW control interventions accordingly. It also highlights areas where further research is necessary if any firm conclusions are to be drawn.

### 2.1 Methodology

A variety of research tools were used to conduct this research study:

- Household surveys (HHS)<sup>5</sup>
- Focus group transcripts
- Secondary literature
- Statistical data
- The Internet
- Print and electronic media
- Anthropological field studies

<sup>5</sup> The data from the HHS throughout the report is quoted simply as 'HHS'. Unless otherwise indicated it refers to the HHS that were conducted as part of the following SALW Surveys: Holtom, P. et al, *Turning the page: Small Arms and Light Weapons in Albania*. Centre for Peace and Disarmament Education and Saferworld, December 2005; Rynn, S. et al, *Taming the Arsenal – Small Arms and Light Weapons in Bulgaria*. SEESAC, Belgrade, 2005; Wolf-Christian Paes et al, *Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey – Bosnia and Herzegovina*. UNDP, Sarajevo, July 2004; Taylor, Z. et al, *Living with the Legacy – SALW Survey of Republic of Serbia*. UNDP, Belgrade 2005; Rynn, S. et al, *Public Perceptions of Small Arms and Security in South Serbia*. SEESAC, Belgrade, 2004; Khakee, A. & Florquin, N. *Kosovo and the Gun: A Baseline Assessment of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Kosovo*. Small Arms Survey / UNDP, Geneva, June 2003; Florquin, N & O'Neill Stoneman, S. 'A house isn't a home without a gun - SALW Survey of Republic of Montenegro'. SEESAC, Belgrade, 2004; Grillot, S. et al, *A Fragile Peace: Guns and Security in post-conflict Macedonia*. SEESAC, Belgrade, 2004.





The historical analysis heavily relied upon existing historiographies of the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, the national liberation movements, the Balkan Wars, and WWI and WWII. There are no specific monographs that focus on people's attitudes and the use of arms during these periods, so the researchers have identified the main historical trends in arms proliferation among the civilian population. The analysis also included collections of folklore, songs, tales, rituals, and customs, from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Field notes, collected by the International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR) during a number of field studies in Albania, the UN Administered Territory of Kosovo,<sup>6</sup> Bosnia and Herzegovina,<sup>7</sup> and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia<sup>8</sup> between 1997 and 2005 provided first hand information about various rituals, such as weddings and celebrations after the birth of a child.<sup>9</sup> HHS, focus group transcripts, anthropological field studies, statistical data and the personal experiences of country consultants, who had extensive experience of SALW related issues, were also used.

Statistical data from national statistics, SALW Surveys and submissions to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) as well as information from relevant websites, provided data about different groups of gun holders such as the security services, criminal groups, hunters, or shooting club members. An analysis of newspapers and magazines, both hard copies and electronic files, provided information about how the media represents guns and gun users. The analysis of gun references in popular culture was limited to gleaning information from relevant computer games, songs and gun club websites.

## 2.1 Scope and depth of research

It is important to state that this report is the first of its kind conducted in the region. The research team acknowledge that it will have inevitable shortcomings due to constraints such as limited time for research and production and the lack of information available. However, it is a valuable springboard for further research into linkages between guns and culture in SEE.

An anthropological approach was taken for the research but unfortunately, the research team did not have the opportunity to conduct classic anthropological fieldwork methods such as in-depth interviews and participant observation.<sup>10</sup> Instead, they referred to existing studies, of which there are few, and to their own personal experiences (since the researchers were all from the region). In-depth fieldwork would have been particularly valuable in understanding the significance of gun ownership and use in certain rituals in more detail.

Albania, BiH, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, and Serbia and Montenegro (including Kosovo) were all included in the research. At the time of writing, the SALW Survey of Croatia had not been conducted, so there is limited information about attitudes towards guns in Croatia. In addition, not all the HHS were conducted at the same time. Both these issues have restricted the comparability aspect of the study. Neither was it possible to analyse variations at the local level, for example, it is well known that there is a significant presence of arms in Northern Albania and Eastern Bulgaria but with different attitudes towards guns in each area. However, the HHS could not capture these local variations, except in Serbia where there have been several regional, and a national HHS. Nor was it possible to draw any conclusions about the differences in attitudes between cities and rural areas.

The methods used to research how the media and popular culture represent guns and what attitudes to guns they reproduce, was not as thorough as the research team would have liked. This is because there were no

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<sup>6</sup> Hereafter referred to as Kosovo.

<sup>7</sup> Hereafter referred to as BiH.

<sup>8</sup> Hereafter referred to as Macedonia.

<sup>9</sup> The aforementioned field studies were conducted using the 'Urgent Anthropology' method, which was developed by Dr. Antonina Zhelyazkova at IMIR. Urgent Anthropology combines in-depth, qualitative sociological interviews with the interviews conducted by anthropologists working in the field.

<sup>10</sup> Participant observation is when a researcher lives among the social group being studied for an extended period of time, as part of their research.



electronic databases available to allow for proper systematic media analysis or monitoring, and because it was not possible to take a methodological approach to study popular culture.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the drawbacks mentioned above, the research team are confident that this study provides a useful overview, which will provide a better understanding of the 'cultural' influences that motivate gun ownership and use.

### 3 A historical analysis of gun ownership and use in SEE

This chapter analyses how regional historic narratives have shaped the way society perceives gun ownership and use in SEE. Special attention is paid to events, characters, rituals and customs from the past, which can be assumed to have had an influence on people who claim 'tradition' as the main reason people own or use guns. Although the historical roots of gun ownership and use are important, as history and 'tradition' are often used to justify the presence of guns, one should not overemphasize the importance of history. This is because there is little to support the claim that weapons proliferation today is a direct consequence of an exceptionally well-armed population in the past. In fact, only a limited number of certain groups in history were armed in SEE. This is discussed in more detail in Annex A.

The border areas of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the semi-independent mountainous regions of Albania and Montenegro have historically been exposed to a higher presence of guns than other areas in SEE. These same areas today (Montenegro, BiH, Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia) continue to have the highest levels of gun ownership in the region. They have also experienced numerous security related issues i.e. weak governance and law enforcement structures, and frequent warfare. For these reasons, the state often allowed local citizens to own guns for self-protection or to undertake law enforcement duties. Consequently, guns had a pronounced influence on the local cultures.

During the national liberation struggles in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, local groups from areas with a high level of gun ownership played a central role. Subsequently their art, symbols, rituals and folklore, with its high cultural acceptance of guns, became more widespread and filtered into national cultural beliefs and practices. It was the images and virtues of these groups that were emphasised during nation-building processes in the Balkans.

However, it is wrong to assume that mythological / romantic historiographies, about heroic armed struggles between the Balkan nations and foreign oppressors, are the cause of an alleged high level of cultural acceptance of guns in Balkan society today. Unlike in the USA, where guns are symbolic of the struggles for independence and the founding of the country,<sup>12</sup> none of the Balkan nations (apart from Greece) achieved national liberation through their own-armed struggle. Outside events such as the war between the Ottoman Empire, and the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires, or the First World War,<sup>13</sup> have always been the catalysts.

Periods of insecurity and instability in the region, which began with the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, have created a common perception that weapons can guarantee personal, family and community security. The authoritarian inter-war Balkan kingdoms and the post-Second World War<sup>14</sup> communist regimes were unable to establish sufficient levels of security and stability to convince all citizens who owned guns they no longer needed to be armed.

It is important to note that the communist regimes did manage to drastically improve internal security situations, causing a sharp decrease in gun crime; however, the perceived security threat from outside the region rose. This situation was most notable in 1948 when Yugoslavia broke away from the Soviet Union, and in Albania, which went through periodic circles of breaking ties with its former allies (Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union and China), each marked by an ever more paranoid intensification of siege mentality. Citizens always had to be ready to

<sup>11</sup> A methodological approach implies for example, taking the top 50 best-known musicians and examining their lyrics (if these were ranked), taking a random sample of 20 gun clubs in each country and interviewing 10 people at each club, or doing the same for computer game clubs etc. No studies have done this yet.

<sup>12</sup> Spitzer, R.J. *The Politics of Gun Control*. New York, Chatham House Publishers, 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Hereafter referred to as WWI.

<sup>14</sup> Hereafter referred to as WWII.



defend their country from an outside enemy, which is best illustrated by the militia defence strategies of national governments of the time.

Another aspect, which may have had an influence on the level of cultural acceptance of guns today, is a lasting and very widespread distrust of the authorities. This originates from times of occupation, by the Ottomans, Austro-Hungarians and Russians. The semi-dictatorial royal regimes in the inter-war Balkan states, intensified the distrust of the authorities. It was at its peak under the communist regimes. This led to most people in SEE viewing all kinds of authorities as oppressive and hostile: people were more likely to use their weapons against the authorities, rather than surrender their guns to them.

### 3.1 Guns in folklore and literature

Balkan folklore and mythology, from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, abounds with stories related to guns, and the important role they played in national liberation movements. Folklore imagery of gun toting revolutionaries created the perception that guns were a fundamental part of national identity and men as protectors of it. Such images continue to exert an influence in modern day society; they are recreated and reproduced in the educational system, TV shows, films, plays and in national celebrations.

Notions of anarchy strongly influenced 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century folklore. Tales abound about the revolutionary movements of the Balkan Christians such as, the formation of rebel groups, dangerous trips to remote towns to buy guns and ammunition, heroes being chased by the enemy or engaged in long battles. The ending usually either laments the tragic deaths of the heroes or celebrates victory over the Turkish forces. Typically these heroic epics are exaggerated tales about the beauty, physical strength, honour and courage of the heroes. They are about men trying to prove their worthiness to be the leader of a *haidouk* (rebel) group, showing off their marksmanship, horse riding and sword fighting skills. People glorified *haidouks* as saviours who could protect them from attacks by the Turks or bandits. Stories and songs about the *haidouk* recount how the groups acquired weapons, the struggles for leadership and the battles they fought. They often describe *haidouk* everyday life, making contrasts between their joyful, romantic daily routines and the cold winters when the *haidouks* hid their guns and returned to their homes.

The dilemma of having to choose between an ordinary life and a *haidouk* life is recalled in folk songs: a **Bulgarian** song 'Pesen za Tatumcho' (Song about Tatumcho), tells how a mother tries to convince her son to give up his *haidouk* life. She pleads with him to sell his 'thin and long rifle and his slender sword' and to take 'healthy and strong bulls to work on the land.' The son decides to obey his mother, and he leaves the *haidouk* group to lead a peaceful life. Then the Turks attack his property and he has to resume fighting to survive and protect his property.<sup>15</sup> Whilst in the epic folk song 'Lov na Bozic' (Hunting on Christmas day) there is no dilemma for the Balkan guerrilla fighters. Two famous *Uskok*<sup>16</sup> leaders, Senjanin Ivo and Senjanin Jure, chose to burn their expensive furniture rather than their weapons to survive a winter's night. In the morning, the Turks attacked them and because they had not burnt their rifles, they were able to fight and win the battle. Thus illustrating the importance of guns.

The way stories depicted guns depended on whether the gun carrier was a *haidouk*, or an Ottoman Army recruit. A *haidouk's* rifle was described as 'thin,' 'light,' 'graceful,' and 'beautiful,' while an army recruit's rifle was 'heavy,' 'dark,' and 'ugly.' One **Bulgarian** song about Kara Tanas' rebel group, from Zheravna, talks of the rebel's *long* rifles, *bright* pistols, *golden* swords and pure *gold* cartridge boxes. In contrast, an 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> century **Albanian** song tells of a young man who obeys the Sultan's orders to join the army, leaving his fiancée behind, to become a 'soldier on a white horse and with a *heavy* rifle on his shoulder.'<sup>17</sup>

Guns often took their names and descriptions from the places they were bought or produced. There is a folk poem about Captain Kuzman, from the Ohrid region, who was a famous **Macedonian** *haidouk* during the time

<sup>15</sup> Arnaudov, M. *Очерки по българския фолклор* (Stories from Bulgarian Folklore). Sofia, 1934, p. 247.

<sup>16</sup> The Ottoman conquest of Bosnia - Herzegovina during the early years of the 16<sup>th</sup> century pushed many Christian inhabitants from their homes towards Dalmatia. There, many of them formed bands of *Uskoks* and engaged in a guerrilla war against the Ottomans. They were welcomed by Emperor Ferdinand I as new settlers in the Military Frontier, and promised an annual subsidy in return for their services. *Uskoks* also engaged in sea piracy, frequently attacking and robbing Ottoman and Venetian ships. See <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uskok>>.

<sup>17</sup> Dokle, N. *Горански народни песни* (Folk Songs of Gorani). Skopje, 2000, pp. 22-25.



Figure 1: Ilyo Voivoda, a 19<sup>th</sup> Century rebel leader in Bulgaria

of Ali Pasha of Yanina (1788-1822). Two local bandit groups (led by Osman and Mehmed) frequently attacked the region. Kuzman gathered men from the nearby towns of Debar and Kicevo to fight the bandits and he successfully put an end to the attacks. The men were described as having white shirts from Yanina, Prizren long rifles, and Voden pistols.<sup>18</sup>

Nineteenth century **Albanian** literature reflects the attitudes of society towards crime and punishment, especially the social acceptability of murder. The notion that *besa* (oath) should be followed regardless of the circumstances, was affirmed, and normalised by its retelling in the first Albanian play in 1875 – 'Besa' by Sami Frasheri.<sup>19</sup> The play is about a man who adheres to customary law, by killing his son and then committing suicide afterwards. 'The Burden of Shame,' written a century later by Dritero Agolli, follows a similar plot: a mother discovers her son has killed one of the friends of her late husband who had previously fought against the enemy. Without hesitation, she asks her son to visit her because she is sick; when he arrives at home she orders his two brothers to kill him. This burden of a fatalistic duty and the obsessive presence of guns in Albanian cultural practices was analysed in Ernest Koliqi's novel 'Blood' in the 1930s. He concluded that the blood feuds, use of guns and murders were a psychological phenomenon typical of Albanian highlanders.

The prominent symbolic importance of guns is clear in old **Albanian** proverbs. 'The rifle has the devil inside' (from Myzeqe),<sup>20</sup> and 'the rifle is asking daily, either for the life of another, or for the owner's life' (from

Southern Albania),<sup>21</sup> define the gun as a symbol of fear. Proverbs also represent guns as a means of protection and social and national identity; 'The gun protects your head, the gun protects the fatherland' (from Podrimje in Kosovo),<sup>22</sup> and 'an Albanian loves his rifle as much as [he loves] his wife' (from Southern Albanian).<sup>23</sup> 'An Albanian with a gun never fears anyone'<sup>24</sup> is a Kosovo proverb in which guns symbolise protection and power. Weapons are also glorified as tools for independence, freedom and honour, for example: 'If you don't fight, nobody will sing a song for you' (from Kosovo),<sup>25</sup> 'One cannot fight a war without a gun' (from Podjevë in Kosovo),<sup>26</sup> 'What do you want a gun for, when it does not shoot' (from Elbasan in Albania),<sup>27</sup> and 'The Albanian is not born of a womb, but of a [rifle's] trigger' (from Southern Albania).<sup>28</sup>

However, guns are symbols of different things across the region. The proverbs, 'Heroism does not come from the gun, but from the mouth' and 'It is bad when the gun is full and the head is empty,' from Rozaje, a Muslim populated area in North Eastern **Montenegro**, represent guns as culturally unacceptable and can be interpreted as having a pacifist attitude towards guns.

<sup>18</sup> Arnaudov. *Очерки по българския фолклор*. p. 258.

<sup>19</sup> A further explanation of *besa* and blood feuds is found in Section 3.2.

<sup>20</sup> Panajoti, J. & Xhagolli, A. eds. *Fjalë të urta të popullit shqiptar* (Albanian proverbs). Tirana, Akademia e shkencave e RPS të Shqipërisë, Instituti i Kulturës popullore, p. 518

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 537.

<sup>22</sup> Panajoti & Xhagolli. eds. *Fjalë të urta të popullit shqiptar*. p. 29.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 834.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 405.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.



In **Albania**, the gun can symbolise a man's honour. A Southern Albanian proverb says, 'You can kill an Albanian, but you cannot make him give up his gun'.<sup>29</sup> Eqerem Bej Vlora gives a vivid example of the cultural belief that a man who is disarmed also loses his honour, and would prefer death to a loss of honour. His story is set in Albania during the Young Turks disarmament campaign. A 15-year old shepherd was going to the market carrying his rifle when soldiers who were collecting weapons from civilians stopped him. The soldiers surrounded him and threatened to shoot him if he did not hand over his rifle, but the boy pleaded with them not to dishonour him. The boy finally said 'I don't want to live without honour. Go ahead and shoot me,' then shot at the soldiers and escaped through an opening made by the crowd of on-lookers, who also disapproved of the soldiers' actions.<sup>30</sup> The story illustrates several cultural concepts of the time; death was preferable to disarmament and subsequent dishonour, secondly the same concept was shared by local civilians who would support someone to maintain their honour and finally people did not trust the state authority who were represented by the soldiers.

Many epic folk songs and poems from the **Croatian** Illyrian Movement period<sup>31</sup> glorify the gun as a symbol of bravery and patriotism.<sup>32</sup> During the Croatian National Renaissance, the Croatian intelligentsia fought for national unity, in resistance to Hungarian nationalism. They used patriotic songs, with references to historic battles against the Ottoman Turks, to arouse Croatian patriotism. One example is the opera *Nikola Šubić Zrinski*, by Ivan Zajc. It is about a 16<sup>th</sup> century Croatian warrior and political leader who led 2,500 brave soldiers to defend the fortress of Szeget in Southern Hungary against 90,000 Turks.

Patriotic folk songs and literature describing heroic armed struggles for national liberation were of exceptional importance in the period of national awakening and consolidation of the newly formed nation-states. Periodic outbreaks of war and hostilities in the region characterised these times around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when these processes were taking place. Presenting the image of brave predecessors, who sacrificed themselves for 'our nation', was necessary for mobilizing the masses to participate in and support the war effort.

Despite folk songs and tales, with references to guns, still being widely popular across SEE and sung at public festivities (like national holidays) and private celebrations (like birthdays and weddings) they have long since lost their motivating power. They now tend only to have a commemorative or entertainment role. The one exception may be the modern reincarnation of patriotic folk songs into turbo-folk, which played an important mobilising role during the conflicts in the 1990s in **Serbia**.

### Box 1: Gender Aspects

In cases where the central topic is competition for leadership through demonstration of physical skills, such as stone throwing, horseback riding, swimming, shooting, mastering of knives and swords, Balkan folklore, and especially that of Bulgarians, Serbs and Macedonians, respects equally both men and women.

Bulgarian, Serbian, Macedonian and Greek folklore contains numerous characters of female *haidouks*, fighting with guns against enemies. This is typical for the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century folk songs, so called 'late heroic epic' period, which emphasized the bravery and the independent spirit of the conquered people. At the same time such folk poems / songs contrast the image of the free and brave Christian woman to the one of the weak and subordinated Muslim female, closed in a harem.

Some of the female *haidouks* in the songs were real end-of-the-19<sup>th</sup> century characters who were described by the collectors of folk stories or even interviewed by the ethnographers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Dimitar Miladinov interviewed the 80 year old Sirma *Voyvoda* (rebel group leader) about her *haidouk* years in Prilep. In her room, he describes, she had guns in holsters and swords hanging from the walls. In another story, described by E. Karanov, the author witnessed in 1860s in the Osogovo region how Rumena *Voyvoda*, could fire a rifle with extreme accuracy and was capable to knock an apple off a person's head.

Source: Mihail Arnaudov, *Очерки по българския фолклор* [Stories from Bulgarian Folklore], Sofia, 1934, pp.251-260.

<sup>29</sup> Panajoti & Xhagolli eds. *Fjalë të urta të popullit shqiptar*, p. 47.

<sup>30</sup> Vlora. *Kujtime*. p. 233.

<sup>31</sup> In Croatia, the publisher Ljudevit Gaj led the Illyrian movement (1835-48), dedicated to Croatian political and cultural independence. See Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2005, 1993-2004 Microsoft Corporation.

<sup>32</sup> Poets include Vatroslav Lisinski, Silvije Starahimir Kranjčević and Ljudevit Gaj.



### 3.2 The status of weapons in customary laws and codes

Customary law was quite common until the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century amongst Albanians and Montenegrins. The most significant Albanian customary law is the Kanun of Lek Dukagjin (see Box 2) and for Montenegrins the most significant were *Grbaljski Zakonik* and *Vasojevicki Zakon*. The laws were based on principles of family honour and they regulated the social norms and everyday life of communities, including the use of weapons.<sup>33</sup> The Kanun governed many regions of **Albania** until the end of WWII, particularly inhabitants of the mountainous North (Malesia) and the South (in Laberia). Features of the Kanun continue to be relevant in some Albanian clans. Although the Kanun has some common elements there are regional differences; there is, for example, the Kanun of Lek Dukagjin, the Kanun of Laberia, of Puka and of Lume.<sup>34</sup> The Kanun also coexisted with Islamic law, the sharia, during the Ottoman period in the Albanian highlands. In cases where the two laws clashed, the Kanun was superior to the Sharia.<sup>35</sup>

The Kanun laid out the judicial and social framework for groups, and prevented people from living in violence, anarchy and arbitrariness.<sup>36</sup> It prescribed a patriarchal, clan based system, which the heads of family and clan leaders oversaw. It considered all men equal, in terms of personal and family honour. This equality became very important in judging cases of theft or murder.<sup>37</sup> Personal honour was almost equal in importance to life itself and the slandering of someone demanded the family take revenge, just as if it was robbery or murder.

*Besa* also regulated life in Albanian highland communities. *Besa* was an oath of solidarity and trust, so that when there was a common external threat, men would suspend blood feuds to fight against the enemies. Albanians used *besa* to forgive blood feuds and to come together during uprisings against the Ottomans in 1846, 1910-1912, and in WWII.<sup>38</sup> The communist government also used it successfully after WW II as a strategy to build a nation-state and to regulate the use of weapons.

There was a resurgence of blood feuds at the end of the communist dictatorship in 1990. The state started losing its powers in 1991 - 1992, and by 1993 the lack of a strong governing authority meant pre-communist customs began to re-enter communities in many parts of Northern Albania. This resulted in people resorting back to the Kanun as a form of self-governance. Former clan leaders promoted this because they saw the revitalisation of the Kanun as an opportunity to regain their powers, land, and privileged position.<sup>39</sup>

During the 1990s, approximately 3,000 families were involved in blood feuds; an estimated 600 occurred in Shkoder, which is not surprising given it is Northern Albania where the Kanun has its strongest roots. In recent years, due to reconciliation efforts, the number of blood feuds appears to have declined. However, the percentage of blood feud murders of total murders has remained constant. In 1998, there were 45, out of a total of 573 murders, which were related to the Kanun. In 2004, it had fallen to 10 out of 119 murders being attributed to a blood feud.<sup>40</sup> In 2001, 1376 families still lived under a blood feud.<sup>41</sup>

Blood vendettas have existed in other parts of the region but not to such a degree. It is most prominent amongst Albanians and Montenegrins,<sup>42</sup> but blood vendettas also survived in BiH well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, according to Sudetic.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Elezi, I. *E drejta zakonore e Labërisë* (The Traditional Law in the Region of Laberia). Tirana, Toena, 2002, p. 27.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>38</sup> Elezi, *E drejta zakonore e Labërisë*, p. 35.

<sup>39</sup> *South Eastern Europe SALW Monitor 2005*. pp. 98-100.

<sup>40</sup> Website of the Committee for Nationwide Reconciliation, at <[www.pajtimi.com](http://www.pajtimi.com)>, 17 May 2005.

<sup>41</sup> Website of the Committee for Nationwide Reconciliation, at <[www.pajtimi.com](http://www.pajtimi.com)>, 17 May 2005.

<sup>42</sup> More information about the history of blood vendettas in Montenegrin society is provided in Annex A.

<sup>43</sup> Sudetic, C. *Blood and Vengeance: One Family's Story of the War in Bosnia*. New York, Penguin Books, 1999, pp. 89-90.



YEAR	RECORDED HOMICIDES	HOMICIDES (BLOOD FEUDS)	HOMICIDES (BLOOD FEUDS) (%)
1998	573	45	7.8
1999	496	41	8.2
2000	275	18	6.5
2001	208	32	15.4
2002	179	13	7.2
2003	144	12	8.3
2004	119	10	11.9

Table 1: Number of recorded murders and blood feud killings in Albania 1997 - 2004<sup>44</sup>

### Box 2: The Kanun of Lek Dukagjin

The Kanun of Lek Dukagjin prescribes particular conduct and procedures, in its 12 chapters. It regularly stipulates what is acceptable gun ownership and use, for example it says the following in the sections on 'Murder' and 'Ambush', which are taken from chapter 10 Articles 118 and 119 (Gjecovi, S. Leka Dukaagini's Canon, FI&GA, Tetovo, 1994, pp. 166-168):

*'Whoever shoots the bullet, shall take the blood upon himself.'*

*'If someone starts to gather friends, in order to organize an ambush for someone, they shall say 'All rifles which will fire are mine!' If someone is killed, the leader / initiator shall take the blood upon himself.'*

*'The rifle brings blood to the house,'* (i.e. the family, not the individual perpetrator, takes responsibility for a murder).

*'If someone hires a rifle, without the knowledge of the rifle's owner, and then kills someone on an ambush he has organised, the obligation for the blood shall be on the murderer, and not on the rifle's owner.'*

*'If a rifle and bread are given, with the knowledge that a murder will occur, it shall bring blood to the house of the one who has given them.'*

Rather than 'blood' meaning guilt, it means the entering of an individual and their family, into a blood feud. These can be an endless series of murders, sometimes lasting for decades.

The Kanun provides a detailed code of honour for a murderer (in Article 119), which makes murder socially acceptable and not a crime. The Kanun says the perpetrator is not a criminal, and that murder is a special ritual, related to respect, dignity and *besa* (the word of honour);

*'The murderer shall not dare to take the gun of the killed one. If he does so, for the shameful act the murderer shall owe double blood.'*

*'When a human is killed, the murderer must announce that he has committed the murder, in order not to embarrass the parents of the killed one.'* (Article 844):

*'Only adult men can be fired at from an ambush and not women, children, houses and livestock.'* (Article 835)

The Kanun of Lek Dukagjin is still respected today in parts of Albania and Kosovo, and in some Albanian communities in Macedonia and Montenegro.

<sup>44</sup> Holtom et al. *Turning the Page: SALW in Albania*.



## 4 Civilian gun ownership and use in present-day SEE

This section provides an overview of civilian gun ownership and use, and the social and legal framework which regulates gun related behaviours and practices. It examines gun ownership and use that are legitimised by legal regulations, and practices that are motivated by cultural reasons that underpin specific societies.

### 4.1 Legal Regulations

There are laws in all countries and territories to regulate civilian weapon ownership and use.<sup>45</sup> However, the severity of these laws, and most probably their effectiveness to control gun ownership and use, will vary. Over time the law, if implemented, should indirectly have an effect on people's attitudes to guns and what they perceive as culturally acceptable behaviour. With some variations, guns are permitted for self-defence, property protection, hunting and sports shooting. Montenegro, on paper at least, appears to be tightening up on gun ownership and use with the 2004 Arms Law, which only issues licenses for weapons carriage to official authorised holders, who are performing specific security-related jobs or sporting activities.<sup>46</sup> This appears to be stricter than Albania's 1992 Weapons Law, which allows state officials, hunters, businesspeople with over US\$ 500,000 of capital, and people living in border areas, to possess weapons legally.<sup>47</sup> It suggests that the Albanian government is not as strict on gun control, and could give out the message that there is a greater tolerance of different types of gun ownership and use. However, further research would be needed to assess how these laws are actually implemented on the ground. Similarly, the law in Republika Srpska in BiH, is not specific about the types of gun use it prohibits in public. It says, 'The use of weapons is forbidden in public places, and in other places where the use of weapons may jeopardize the safety of people, the premises, and disturb public order and peace.'<sup>48</sup> This could suggest the government's lack of commitment to challenge practices such as celebratory gunfire. All countries and territories to different degrees prohibit the use of guns in public.

### 4.2 Civilian gun ownership

#### 4.2.1 Gun ownership rates

Serbia and Montenegro have the highest gun ownership rates (28.24% and 19.38% respectively) in the region, but not the highest in Europe (see Table 2). These are comparable to rates in the Scandinavian countries. The former republics of Yugoslavia all have higher rates of gun ownership than Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova and Albania. This was also the case prior to 1989. This is probably because the communist regime in former Yugoslavia was less repressive and restrictive than in the rest of SEE. There were significant differences across the region before 1990, even in the former Yugoslavian republics. In the period 1990 to 2004, all parts of former Yugoslavia had considerable increases in the levels of gun ownership. However, Serbia had the highest increase, which is probably because it was involved in armed conflicts for the longest period of time. Albania experienced an influx of arms in 1997, which brought its gun ownership levels up to rates comparable with parts of former Yugoslavia.

Changes in gun ownership levels can provide an understanding of the role and uses society perceives guns to have if examined as part of the larger political and socio-economic context. A variety of factors can influence gun ownership levels, such as changes in legislation, war, internal security and crime. The most important factors to have affected recent perceptions of arms are the armed conflicts and periods of political instability. But without further research, it is not possible to state exactly how the public's perceptions of weapons has changed, or to measure what increase in levels of gun ownership is due to recent conflict and insecurity.

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<sup>45</sup> Further information about the legal regulations in each country or territory can be found in Annex B.

<sup>46</sup> *South Eastern Europe SALW Monitor 2005*. p. 150.

<sup>47</sup> See Council of Ministers Decision No. 53, 'For the definition of border areas, types of weapons, number of ammunition, the criteria for granting licenses for legal weapons and the respective tariffs,' 04 February 1999 and Council of Ministers Decision No. 56, 'For the granting of licenses for legal weapons for the heads and partners of commercial companies,' 04 February 1999.

<sup>48</sup> "Official Gazette of the Republika Srpska", 13/93, 16/95, 6/96, 8/96, Correction, 9/96, 19/98.





COUNTRY	POPULATION (2004)	NUMBER OF REGISTERED FIREARMS IN 1990 PER 100 POPULATION	NUMBER OF REGISTERED FIREARMS (LATEST KNOWN)	NUMBER OF REGISTERED FIREARMS PER 100 (LATEST KNOWN)	NUMBER OF ILLEGAL FIREARMS (LOWEST ESTIMATES)	ESTIMATED TOTAL OF NUMBER OF REGISTERED AND ILLEGAL FIREARMS PER 100 POPULATION
Germany	82,431,390	-	7,000,000	8.49	17,000,000	29.12
Serbia	7,250,000	8.60	1,103,300	15.22	944,000	28.24
Sweden	9,001,774	-	1,793,712	19.93	4,000,000	20.23
Montenegro	650,000	13.20	86,000	13.23	40,000	19.38
Denmark	5,432,335	-	955,000	17.58	-	17.58
Kosovo	2,300,000	4.10	65,540	2.85	264,460	14.35
Macedonia	2,045,000	5.20	156,000	7.63	100,000	12.52
BiH	4,025,000	8.30	345,365	8.58	140,397	12.07
Croatia	4,495,000	6.50	376,000	8.36	152,850*	11.77
Albania	3,563,000	-	66,000	1.85	200,000	7.47
Bulgaria	7,450,390	1.30	275,690	3.70	93,206	4.95
Moldova	4,455,000	-	49,780	1.12	50,000*	2.24
Romania	22,329,977	-	87,316	0.39	40,000*	0.57

Table 2: Gun ownership levels (in ranking order)

Sources: Homicide data: Romania (2001) - UNODC; Moldova (2002) - UNODC; Bulgaria (2002) - Ministry for Internal Affairs; Albania (2002) - UNODC; Croatia (2000) - WHO / Interpol; BiH (2002) - Report on Work of the Mol of the RS (Years 2002-2003), and Federation Statistical Institute, Sarajevo, (quoted in BiH SALW Survey); Macedonia (2000) - UNODC; Serbia - (2002) SALW Survey; Kosovo (2002) - UNMIK Police, quoted by SAS *Kosovo and the Gun*; Montenegro (2001) - SALW Survey Montenegro; Denmark (1993) - UN Firearm Study; Germany (2002) - UNODC; Sweden (2002) - UNODC; Registered firearms - SALW Surveys except Romania - Diaconu, A. Pistolarii Romaniei, *Evenimentul Zilei*, 7 March 2004; Illegal weapons data - SALW Surveys; Sweden, Germany and Denmark - Small Arms Survey 2003; Population - CIA Fact Book, at <www.cia.gov>.

\* Estimates: Croatia's figures are based on the legal / illegal ratio for BiH (BiH SALW Survey); Romania and Moldova's figures are based on the legal / illegal ratio from the Bulgaria SALW Survey.

A greater insight could be gained by analysing levels of gun ownership among different ethnic groups. With the data available this is only possible in Macedonia because its HHS had a statistically significant sample from the Albanian minority. The HHS data indicates that an Albanian is more likely to be a victim of firearm injuries (77% compared to 22%), Albanians hear gunshots more often than ethnic Macedonians (18% compared to 3%), and they are less likely to believe that firearms have decreased after the conflicts.<sup>49</sup> From this, it could be assumed that the Albanian community has higher gun ownership levels than the ethnic Macedonians. This may not necessarily be for 'cultural' reasons but because they do not feel as safe as Macedonians and so more of them have guns. The results may not point to higher gun ownership but rather a difference in the way guns are used which creates a perception that gun ownership is higher amongst Albanians in Macedonia.

<sup>49</sup> Grillot, S. et al. *A Fragile Peace: Guns and Insecurity in post-conflict Macedonia*. SEESAC, 2004, p. 48.



COUNTRY	TYPE OF SURVEY	REASON FOR GUN OWNERSHIP							EXACT HHS QUESTION
		PERSONAL PROTECTION	PROTECT PROPERTY	WORK	SPORT SHOOTING	HUNTING	MANY OTHER PEOPLE HAVE GUNS	PART OF THE TRADITION OR VALUED FAMILY POSSESSION (IF THE RESULT IS IN ITALICS)	
Albania	City	43.9	-	11.1	3.3	21.3	-	7.4	What is the reason why you own a gun(s)?
BiH	National	45.0	23.0	1.0	2.0	13.0	7.0	4.0	What is the main reason for your household to acquire a gun legally?
Bulgaria	City	21.4	-	28.6	11.1	21.4	-	7.9	What is the reason why you own a gun(s)?
Bulgaria	National	20.4	16.0	17.6		21.7	3.0	1.1	What are the <u>three</u> main reasons for you, or a member of your household, to keep firearms?
Croatia	City	33.6	-	18.6	6.8	10.0	-	<i>19.1</i>	What is the reason why you own gun(s)?
Kosovo	National	51.0	13.2	0.8	2.1	23.8	0.4	-	Why would your household choose to own a firearm?
Macedonia	National	64.4	8.9	2.0	4.5	10.9	2.4	-	What would be the main reason for your household to choose to acquire a gun legally?
Moldova	National	39.8	21.6	1.8		19.4	2.9	0.9	What are the <u>three</u> main reasons why you would choose to <u>own</u> a firearm?
Montenegro	National	43.8	15.2	4.2	10.1	8.2	5.6	-	Why would your household choose to own a firearm?
Romania	City	56.1	-	22.0	2.0	17.0	-	-	What is the reason why you own a gun(s)?
Serbia	National	32.9	3.1	9.0	See Hunting	27.9	-	1.4/ <i>11.4</i>	What is the most important reason for you / family member to keep a gun

**Table 3: Reasons for gun ownership**

Sources: For the national figures for Moldova, Serbia and Bulgaria - SEESAC SALW HHS; For Albania and the city figures for Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia - International Crime Victimization City surveys (around 2000), at <<http://unicri.it>>.

#### 4.2.2 Reasons for gun ownership

People's reasons for owning and using a gun are not static. They will change over time depending on changes at the local, national and regional level. Someone may have owned a rifle during communist times to use for hunting, but due to the country's involvement in a conflict and a rise in crime rates, their primary reason may have changed to self-protection. Table 3 shows the current reasons for gun ownership in SEE. Most people said they owned a gun for personal protection and / or to protect property, except in Bulgaria. In Bulgaria hunting was the most common reason, but in the city areas most respondents said they owned guns for work purposes. The



reason for such a high number of individuals needing guns for work is because about half the handgun owners are private security guard staff.<sup>50</sup> Croatia had the most respondents who said they owned a gun because it was a valued family possession (19%), closely followed by Serbia, where 12.8% of respondents said they owned a gun because of traditional reasons.

It is also possible to analyse people's perceptions of why others own guns, using the SALW Surveys. The percentage of respondents who felt 'tradition' played a principal role in gun ownership is shown in Table 4. It is important to note that the explanations respondents gave for why other people own guns are only their perceptions, and may not actually reflect the real reasons for gun ownership, or reflect the reasons why the respondents themselves own a gun. 'Tradition' appears to be the main reason people own guns in Montenegro (21.8%) and Albania (15.8%) and Serbia (14.8%), and has least influence in Bulgaria (1.2%), closely followed by Macedonia (3%).

COUNTRY	% WHO CITED GUNS ARE 'PART OF TRADITION'	EXACT QUESTION ASKED IN SURVEY
Albania	15.8	Aside from personal protection, protection of family and property, what are the three main reasons why people keep guns?
BiH	4.0	In your personal opinion, what is the most common reason for people in your local area to keep guns?
Bulgaria	1.2	In your opinion, what are the main reasons for people to keep guns?
Kosovo	5.0	Why do you think people keep guns?
Moldova	6.1	Aside from protection for self, family and property, what are the three main reasons for people to keep guns?
Montenegro	21.8	In your personal opinion what is the most common reason for the people in your community to keep guns?
Macedonia	3.0	In your personal opinion, what is the most common reason for the people in your local area to keep guns?
Serbia	14.8	In your opinion, what are the main reasons for people to keep guns?

**Table 4: Perception of why other people own guns**

Source: SEESAC SALW HHS

A revitalisation of traditional beliefs and practices has occurred across the former socialist / communist countries of the region, particularly concerning religion and religious rituals (for example, the celebration of Christmas, Easter and church marriages). This may be a result of 'self-conscious traditionalism',<sup>51</sup> whereby an ethnic group adheres to particular cultural beliefs and practices, which the group believes are uniquely suited to it and are necessary to maintain the identity of the group. Nationalist parties have been one of the big catalysts in promoting this traditional discourse and reviving 'customary ways', as a means to promote their own political goals. Therefore, the perception of gun ownership as traditional should be examined rather as a reinvention of tradition.

Whether real or imagined this recourse to tradition should not be ignored, especially from a policy perspective. It is not just affecting people's views of gun ownership but it is part of a larger concept where society is re-evaluating pre-communist social order and cultural practices. As part of this, reinvented traditions are being introduced and

<sup>50</sup> According to the Ministry for Internal Affairs there are 130,000 private security guards - communication to CSD.

<sup>51</sup> Self-conscious traditionalism was originally an expression of German nationalism and was supposed to counteract the universalism of French Enlightenment. It aimed to preserve the purity of the 'ancestral culture' (Wrong, D. Cultural Relativism as Ideology, *Critical Review* Vol.11 No. 2 Spring, pp. 291-300). The idea that people can only flourish in their own 'ancestral culture' is one of the main characteristics of 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic nationalism. Its proponents, often city-born intellectuals, considered the village and peasantry as the 'repository of the soul of the people,' where the sole of ancient traditions is preserved (Barry, *Culture and Equality*, p. 263).



they could, with time, gradually become accepted and practiced by mainstream society. One argument is that the resurrection of pre-communist rituals and values is providing an order and structure, as a way of compensating for the state's failure to do so. If this is the case then the strengthening of democratic governance and a return to order could see a reduction in this recourse to traditions.

The North-South stereotypes that exist in Albania are an example of the way people use 'tradition' to identify themselves and others. Guns, or their lack of guns, seem to be key to the way each group is perceived. The *Gegs* predominantly inhabit Northern Albania, but the *Malesori* group live in the Northernmost highlands, usually in closed kinship groups. The *Malesori*'s counterparts in the South are the *Kurveleshi*. The *Malesori* and *Kurveleshi* are both frequently described by others as being 'primitive,' 'brave' and 'skilful with guns' with a 'stern character.' According to Zhelyazkova's fieldwork the stereotypes are unchangeable and have always existed.

*'The Tosks from the South are the intellectuals, the real politicians and men of art, the warriors come only from the villages of the Kurveleshi, while the Gegs have always been armed soldiers, forming the army and police classes and they continue to be like that. In addition, the Malesori are the wildest and most armed ones. It has always been like that, during the Ottomans and during Enver Hoxha.'*

People from the lowlands and the coast define those from the mountainous areas, as people who do not abide by state law but by the traditional Kanun system. *'If they live higher than 1,700 metres above sea level, they are like the Malesori and Kurveleshi – they are ruled by the Kanun norms, they are wild and conservative'*.<sup>52</sup> Albanian national heroes tend to be of *Kurveleshi* origin, reproducing the image of heroes as wild, armed fighters living by the Kanun. In Northern Albania, men speak with pleasure about the times gone by when the rifle symbolised the independence of its owner, and had the important position of being displayed above the fireplace. In interviews they said they felt proud of their weapons and would not part with them at any price. One respondent said, *'I cannot imagine my family life without the pistol under my pillow'*.<sup>53</sup> This is further evidence of a traditional discourse in Albania that places great symbolic value on the gun and practices involving guns.

## 4.3 Legal civilian gun use

### 4.3.1 Shooting / gun clubs<sup>54</sup>

Sports shooting was encouraged during the communist regimes. The state supported the involvement of children in shooting activities and funded the professional shooting teams. Shooting ranges were often situated in schools and sport centres and as a consequence the general population have been exposed to shooting as an acceptable sport. It also meant there was an existing infrastructure of facilities and trainers for the development of modern gun clubs. Modern recreational shooting / gun clubs have developed across SEE.

In contrast to the old state-run gun clubs the modern day clubs are in general privately run, entertainment complexes where members (usually men) come to improve their marksmanship skills, to socialize and to relax (see Figure 2). Interviews with shooting club members in **Bulgaria** revealed that for most visiting the range it is a weekly leisure activity, where they socialise with friends and unwind.<sup>55</sup> To reflect this, shooting clubs like the one within VIP Trading's (a Bulgarian arms trade company) compound also has restaurants and coffee shops, complete with soundproof windows looking onto the ranges.

The exception is probably **Albania** where a lack of state sponsorship has led to a decline in the sport. Only 3.3% of gun owners in Albania said they had a gun for shooting, compared to Bulgaria that had the highest number who cited shooting as the main reason for gun ownership (11.1%) (see Table 3). The Albanian shooting ranges tend now to be cluttered with cars and buses. A stray bullet from the Studenti shooting range caused a

<sup>52</sup> Zhelyazkova, A. *The Albanian National Problem and the Balkans, Fieldwork*. Sofia, IMIR, 2001, pp. 87-107 and Zhelyazkova, A. ed. *Problems of Multi-ethnicity in the Western Balkans, Fieldwork*, Sofia, IMIR, 2004, pp. 143-167 and pp. 243-276.

<sup>53</sup> Zhelyazkova, A. *The Albanian National Problem and the Balkans, Fieldwork*. Sofia, IMIR, 2001, pp. 87-107 and *Problems of Multi-ethnicity in the Western Balkans. Fieldwork*, Antonina Zhelyazkova, ed. Sofia, IMIR, 2004, pp. 143-167, pp. 243-276.

<sup>54</sup> Further information about shooting clubs in each territory and country can be found in Annex C.

<sup>55</sup> Interviews with gun club visitors June 2004 – June 2005.

political incident in 1993 when the bullet went into the house of the Albanian Catholic Archbishop.<sup>56</sup> Shooting is usually an activity of the wealthy because of the high cost of rental, bullets, instruction etc. In Moldova it costs a minimum \$US 10 plus \$US 0.30 for each bullet, which in relation to a Moldovan salary is expensive.

Sports shooting has probably been officially established for the longest in **Montenegro**, which has had a shooting union since 1848. The Montenegrin Shooting Union's website says, 'shooting has deep roots in Montenegrin society, expressed in the saying, "a house can burn down, but a rifle – never!"'<sup>57</sup> The website reproduces the image of guns as eternal and unbeatable, and an essential part of Montenegrin culture. Statistics show that sports shooting in Montenegro is a popular reason to own a gun when compared to other countries and territories in the region.



**Figure 2: The lounge and bar areas of the Magnum Gun Club in Chisinau (left) and the Levski Shooting Club in Sofia (right), where clients can watch the shooting through a soundproof glass window, while they socialise or wait for their turn to shoot.**

Source: Magnum Gun Club website and Levski Shooters Club website

In SEE shooting as a sport seems the least popular and undeveloped in **Macedonia**. The Macedonian Shooting Federation has 10 registered shooting clubs and 123 individuals actively involved in sports shooting, in comparison to Bulgaria's 67 shooting ranges, Montenegro's 251 shooting clubs or the 50 gun clubs in Moldova's capital, Chisinau.

Sports shooting may well increase society's perception of what is acceptable gun practise but it is contestable whether it can also be linked to making irresponsible or illegal gun ownership or use culturally acceptable. Many visitors to **Bulgarian** shooting clubs do not own a gun or actually want to own a gun, which suggests that in Bulgaria it does not promote any type of gun ownership. What may have an influence is how sports shooting is portrayed and how society perceives those who participate in sports shooting. Professional sports shooters used to be glorified, and in Bulgaria for example, some of the most successful professional sports shooters have gone into politics i.e. General Nonka Matova and Vesela Lecheva were both Members of Parliament from 2001 to 2005.

<sup>56</sup> Tuci, A. Sporti i qitjes është sporti më i rrezikshëm, *Sporti Shqiptar newspaper* at <<http://www.sportishqiptar.com.al/sporti/view/printlajm.php?ID=9742>> [Sourced on 27 January 2005].

<sup>57</sup> See <<http://www.cokcg.org/streljacki.htm>>.



### 4.3.2 Hunting

Hunting as a sports and leisure activity has a long tradition in SEE. Hunters are currently most widespread in Serbia, closely followed by Kosovo and Macedonia (see Table 5). Moldova has the least number of hunters. However, the only place where it is the most common reason for owning a gun is in Bulgaria (see Table 3). Hunting was permitted, to certain groups in society, under the communist regimes so there were already well-established hunting societies in the region by the early 1990s. Hunting as a main subsistence activity has ceased, although in some mountainous regions it may still be a means of topping up meat intake. Hunting is now much more of a social activity, with its own set of rituals, rules and etiquette. It is usually an activity for the elite males in society.

Hunting is often associated with prominent figures in the region, thus reproducing the perception that guns are an accessory of the rich, powerful and successful. In Croatia, a General in the Croatian Army and the President of the Croatian Hunting Association called Đuro Dečak, likes to publicly promote his desire for hunting. Ivica Todorić, who is probably the most influential Croatian businessperson, is very public about his passion for hunting and his generous support to the preservation and maintenance of several hunting areas in the country. In return, he uses the hunting grounds to entertain business clients. Enver Hoxha, Albania's leader for 40 years, was also an avid hunter. The President of Moldova, Vladimir Voronin, is the Honourable Chairman of the Hunters' and Fishermen's Society. According to *VIP-Magazine*, the President has 30 years experience of hunting and he prefers to hunt with 'his team.' The current Prime Minister, Mr. Vasile Tarlev, is also involved in hunting.

There does appear to be a tendency towards the militarization of hunting. This is apparent in the design of hunting outfits, which are commonly military fatigues, the use of military vehicles and the likeness of hunting rifles to military weapons. Figure 3 shows how an 'Arsenal' hunting rifle has been designed to attract hunters because of its resemblance to the 'Arsenal' assault rifle, whose prototype is the AK-47.

Hunting, like sports shooting appears to be a pursuit of the wealthy, particularly men, and people in prominent positions.

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF HUNTERS	HUNTERS PER 100,000 POPULATION
Serbia	449,376	6,198
Finland	291,738	5,585
Kosovo	105,600	4,591
Macedonia	82,095	4,014
BiH	101,758	2,528
France	1,479,562	2,439
Czech Republic	233,700	2,281
Bulgaria	108,704	1,459
Montenegro	8,600	1,323
Croatia	52,000	1,157
Albania	40,000	1,123
Germany	339,160	411
Romania	78,493	352
Moldova	12,100	272

**Table 5: Number of hunters in Europe<sup>1</sup>**  
 (in ranking order)



Figure 3: A 7.62 x 39mm 'Arsenal' self loading hunting rifle (left) is designed to attract hunters through its resemblance to the 7.62 x 39mm 'Arsenal' assault rifle (right), whose prototype is the AK-47.

Source: Arsenal Co. at <<http://www.arsenal-bg.com>>.

## 4.4 Illegal civilian gun use

### 4.4.1 Celebratory Gunfire

Celebratory gunfire is a phenomenon that occurs across SEE, to different extents and for a variety of reasons. To gain a comprehensive understanding of celebratory gunfire, the motives for it and its symbolic meaning, it is necessary to conduct in-depth anthropological or socio-physical studies. Currently none exist and it is beyond the scope of this study. Instead this section provides an overview of current celebratory practices in the region, and offers some historical and cultural reasons for it.

COUNTRY	HAVE YOU WITNESSED THE USE OF A FIREARM?	HAVE YOU WITNESSED CELEBRATORY GUNFIRE? <sup>57</sup>
Albania	41%	27%
Bulgaria	12%	6%
Moldova	17%	7%
Serbia	48%	40%

Table 6: Celebratory Gunfire

Source: HHS of Bulgaria, Moldova, Serbia, and Albania.

Celebratory gunfire is more common in Albania and the former Yugoslavia, than in Bulgaria or Moldova (see Table 6). It can happen at a number of events or occasions, for example at weddings, after the birth of a child, religious festivals, New Year or after a victory at a sporting event. The latter two occasions are relatively new occurrences, whilst the others have deeper historical roots. Historical accounts refer to celebratory gunfire occurring in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it is difficult to establish any continuity with current practices.

The communist government prohibited celebratory gunfire, and it became virtually non-existent. It was revived in the 1990s after the fall of communism. The ethnic conflicts, and the increase in violent crime and gun proliferation that followed, only accelerated the practice of celebratory gunfire. Present day use of celebratory gunfire tends to have more links with the widespread availability of guns, and the influence of violent films and computer games, rather than being as a result of 'tradition'. Although the links with current reasons for celebratory gunfire may be tenuous, there are a number of old customs, which undoubtedly involved the firing of guns.

Shooting a gun at a wedding or after the birth of a child, particularly a son, used to be a way of announcing the event to neighbouring villages, especially in mountainous areas such as Albania and Montenegro. It is still practiced today to signal a family's happiness to others, even though its use as a means to transmit a message is obsolete. Festive holidays, such as Christmas, New Year's Eve and Easter, are sometimes marked by celebratory gunfire at midnight. It became more popular after the fall of communism, which allowed a free expression of religion. In some Catholic areas of Albania and Croatia, firing a gun at Christmas and Easter is an essential part of the traditional rituals (see section on Croatia).

<sup>58</sup> SEE Countries - SEESAC SALW Surveys, based on actual numbers or on estimated share of weapons owned for hunting purposes; EU countries data - Swan, J. *We Are not Alone*, ESPN Outdoors, at <[http://espn.go.com/outdoors/conservation/columns/swan\\_james/1517522.html](http://espn.go.com/outdoors/conservation/columns/swan_james/1517522.html)> [Sourced on 05 December 2005]. A word of caution is needed concerning the numbers stated above because there are also a large number of illegal hunters, in addition to the officially registered hunters.



An occurrence that is becoming more frequent is celebratory gunfire at national sports events. When national teams from the former Yugoslavia play football, basketball, volleyball, handball or other team sports, against each other it undoubtedly results in celebratory gunfire. The most notorious games are those played between the Croatian and Serbian-Montenegrin national teams. However, this did not occur when the teams were part of the former Yugoslavia. The tension and animosity between Croatia and Serbia-Montenegro is illustrated by the celebratory gunfire that took place in Zagreb when NATO started bombing Serbia on 24 March 1999.<sup>59</sup> In contrast, in ethnically mixed areas, such as Macedonia, people celebrate victories not only of the Macedonian teams, but also of Albanian or even Croatian or Serbian football or basketball teams.

There are a variety of reasons why people engage in celebratory gunfire. People can do it for personal / psychological reasons, like to show off or to express happiness, or sometimes people use it to signify the importance of something. The latter is part of a wider European tradition of accompanying significant events, such as weddings, with canon gunfire, fireworks or firecrackers. One could argue that despite a change in the tools, they are all fulfilling virtually the same function. 'Tradition' is also cited as a reason for celebratory gunfire. Couples, who want a 'traditional' wedding, will intentionally seek out old rituals and customs to include in their ceremony. This can be explained partly by a desire for a wedding that is different from the standard civil marriage, which was imposed during communism. A revival of civilian gun use may also be an effect of governments using 19<sup>th</sup> century imagery to evoke feelings of patriotism and nationalism within society.

### Box 3: Examples of past practices of celebratory gunfire in Catholic areas of Albania

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century celebratory gunfire was an important part of Catholic wedding ceremonies, in the mountainous areas of Northern Albania. When the groom and his wedding party first went to collect the bride, both family groups would begin firing in the air upon seeing each other. After the festivities they would start firing again. In Mirdita, it was customary for all the male relatives on the bride's side to provide a bullet for the bride's dowry (*fishek ne paje*). This was to symbolize the approval of the groom by the bride's family and to give him permission to kill his wife if she was ever disobedient to him (pp.167 - 168).

Easter was also celebrated with celebratory gunfire. In the village of Ibalja, in Puka, tribes would fire in the air as they approached the church, shouting, 'Are you there Don....?'. The parish priest's servant would come out of the church, and reply with 'Yes, indeed he is here,' whilst firing in the air. After mass, the congregation would face the Muslim neighbourhood in a line and fire in the air again. A target shooting competition would then take place (p.82).

At midnight on Christmas Eve, in Boga, people would fire into the air whilst the church bells rang. In Mirdita, men would fire in the air at sunset on Christmas Eve, and again the day after Christmas while the priest was blessing the congregation (p.58).

It would be speculative to assume that present-day celebratory gunfire has its roots in religious or nationalist practices (such as shooting towards the Muslim neighbourhoods). There was no evidence to establish such links.

Source: Robert Elsie, *The Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology and Folk Culture*,

In the past, in **Albania**, celebratory gunfire formed a part of some rituals and festivities (see Box 3). There is some evidence to link the (re)appearance of celebratory gunfire with increased levels of insecurity, conflicts and weapons proliferation. After the crisis in 1997 and 1998, celebratory gunfire at weddings and New Year celebrations resumed, particularly in North Eastern Albania. Albanian wedding processions are often preceded with the (Albanian) national flag and gunfire.<sup>60</sup> Automatic weapons, hunting rifles, and old pistols called *kubura* are all used in celebratory gunfire.<sup>61</sup> Guns have also been used in Albania as part of rites of passage rituals for boys. In 2005 in the rural regions of Macedonia populated predominately by ethnic Albanians, around Tetovo and Gostivar there were reports of 'guest workers' who had been working in Western Europe coming back and paying 20 Euros to fire a Kalashnikov into the air.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Croatia Backs NATO Bombing of Old Foe Yugoslavia, *Balkan News Daily Press Summary*, 25 March 1999.

<sup>60</sup> Kosovo Weddings Descend into Violence, *Agence France Presse*, 31 July 2000.  
at <<http://www.balkanpeace.org/hed/archive/july00/hed406.shtml>>.

<sup>61</sup> Schwandner-Sievers, S. & Cattaneo, S. 'Gun Culture' in Kosovo: Questioning the Origins of Conflict, *Small Arms Survey 2005: Weapons at War*. Geneva, p.214. For a discussion on the simplicity of relying on gun culture as an explanatory variable for interethnic violence, look at 'Gun Culture' in Kosovo, p. 205 - 223.

<sup>62</sup> 'Печалбари плаќаат и по 20 евра за рафал од калашников' (Well-to-do Pay up to 20 Euro to Fire a Kalashnikov), *Vest*, No.1537, 11 August 2005.



In **Macedonia** there was a sharp increase in celebratory gunfire incidents immediately after the conflicts in 2001 and 2002. This again suggests links between celebratory gunfire and security levels and availability of guns.

In ethnically mixed areas in **BiH** like Mostar, participants of focus groups claimed they heard celebratory gunfire at almost every religious holiday and after big sporting events.<sup>63</sup>

In **Bulgaria** celebratory gunfire is not as common as in other parts of SEE. Only 6% of HHS respondents had witnessed celebratory gunfire, compared to 40% in Serbia (see Table 6). Bulgarian weddings tend not to involve gunfire, and it was not a common practice before the communist period. The only exception is in some parts of the Rhodope Mountains, where Pomaks (Bulgarian Muslims) and Turks live. Here, the groom fires a shot the day after the wedding to confirm that the bride was 'honest' (i.e. a virgin). The shot signals the start of a feast.

When celebratory gunfire does occur in Bulgaria, it usually happens in the cities and small towns, rather than in the rural areas (according to the 2004 SALW Survey of Bulgaria). This is understandable because people in rural areas have fewer arms, and tend to be of older age, so events such as births are infrequent.

EVENT		SERBS	HUNGARIANS	ROMANIANS	SLOVAKS	TOTAL*
Wedding	Appropriate	13.4	26.7	16.7	5.3	16.5
	Inappropriate	85.1	73.3	83.3	94.7	82.8
Sporting Event	Appropriate	7.5	6.7	-	-	5.3
	Inappropriate	91.0	93.3	100	100	94.0
Birth of a child	Appropriate	7.5	23.3	16.7	5.3	14.6
	Inappropriate	91.0	76.7	83.3	94.7	84.7

\*The data also includes 'Others' and 'Unknown' but these have been omitted.

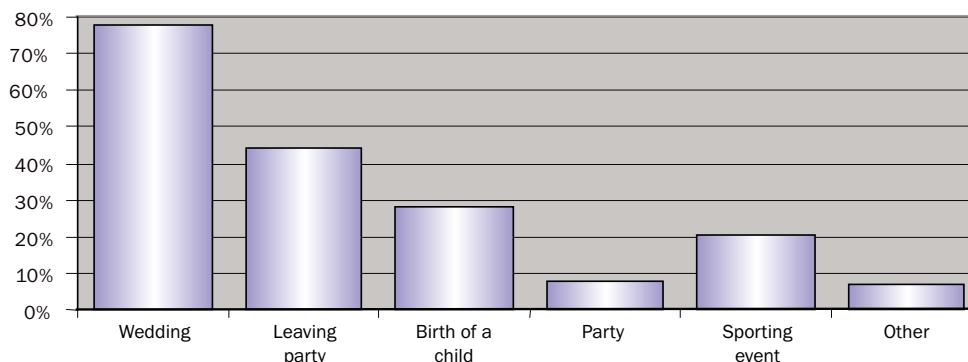
**Table 7: What do you think about shooting at the following events? (%)**

Source: Attree, SASP Test in North East Serbia - Evaluation Report.

In **Serbia** celebratory gunfire, although illegal, seems to be very common. Forty per cent of HHS respondents said they had witnessed celebratory gunfire (see Table 6), which suggests that it is seen as socially acceptable by large parts of society. Focus group discussions and a HHS of young people in Belgrade, indicate that celebratory gunfire is most common at weddings, leaving parties for young conscripts, the birth of a child, birthdays, and sporting events.

A survey conducted amongst young people in Belgrade gives an idea of when celebratory gunfire is used (see Figure 4). The results however, are not representative of the country as a whole. Figures suggest that 80% of respondents had witnessed gunfire at a wedding. This is not to say that celebratory gunfire occurs at most weddings. Instead, it suggests that weddings are the most likely place where young people in Belgrade witness celebratory gunfire.

<sup>63</sup> Paes et al. SALW Survey – Bosnia and Hercegovina, p. 38.



**Figure 4: Use of celebratory gunfire in Belgrade**

Source: Small Arms Problem in Belgrade: A survey of young people's knowledge and attitudes, SEESAC, Belgrade 2003, p.6

Despite the high numbers of people who have witnessed celebratory gunfire the HHS in Northern Serbia found that most of the respondents considered celebratory gunfire inappropriate (see Table 7). The HHS findings also found that a higher percentage of the Hungarian and Romanian ethnic minorities deemed celebratory gunfire appropriate behaviour (at weddings and after the birth of a child), than did the Serb communities. According to the HHS in North Eastern Serbia, the main supporters of celebratory gunfire were young, poorly educated men. Those most likely to disapprove of celebratory gunfire were middle aged to old people. Women generally found it inappropriate on all occasions. These findings should be interpreted with caution. Celebratory gunfire is still illegal in the eyes of the law, and respondents may have given answers that they thought were expected rather than their own personal view. Taking this into account however, it is worth noting that the current situation is a relatively new phenomenon that took root after ten years of the continuous militarization of young men into the former Yugoslavian Army throughout the 1990s.

In **Croatia** celebratory gunfire is viewed as an acceptable practice as part of marriage ceremonies and at some religious festivals in certain regions of Croatia: in the Cetina Valley (at the foot of the Dinaric Alps), in Hrvatsko Zagorje, (in North Western Croatia) and along parts of the coast in Dubrovnik, on Rab Island or Korčula Island. Celebratory gunfire occurred more frequently in the 1990s. Incidences have declined in recent years due to public campaigns, initiated by the Ministry for Internal Affairs, and negative coverage of the practice by the media. The main catalyst for the campaigns was a number of tragic incidents, where onlookers were injured and killed as a result of celebratory gunfire.



**Figure 5 – Campaign poster against celebratory gunfire, New Year's 2005/2006, Albania**

Gunfire occurs as part of traditional marriage rituals in rural areas of the Dinaric Mountains, in inner Dalmatia and in Roma communities in Northern Croatia. They fire guns to signify the solemnity of the occasion. Sometimes they use dynamite instead of firing a gun, especially in Dalmatia. In the Poljica region, next to Split, they use gunfire prior to the actual wedding ceremony in particular circumstances. Once a woman 'escapes' and enters the house of a young man her parents disapprove of, it is impossible for her to return to her family's home. To preserve her honour the head of the young man's household must fire several gunshots, both to announce her escape, and to acknowledge they have accepted her as a future daughter-in-law by the head of the household. Another practice is that the elders fire several gunshots, when a newly wed bride enters her in-laws house for the first time. The traditional weapon they use is a *kubura*, from the Ottoman times. In Croat regions of Herzegovina, they practice similar customs.

Celebratory gunfire at Easter occurs in several parts of Croatia, for example in Kostel and Pregrada, in the Hrvatsko Zagorje region.<sup>64</sup> On Easter Sunday, the local men with their *kubura* or *mužar* pistols will gather in the main square, to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. A similar tradition occurs in Vrlika, in inner Dalmatia. On Easter Sunday the keepers (*grobari*) of the symbolic grave of Christ, fire their

<sup>64</sup> Kuburaško društvo 'Složna kubura' (Society of *kubura* shooters 'Kubura Unity'), at <[http://www.pregrada.hr/kultura/slozna\\_kubura.php](http://www.pregrada.hr/kultura/slozna_kubura.php)>.



*kuburas* to celebrate the resurrection. Communism did not ban Catholicism but it still was not recommended to openly practice one's religion. This meant celebratory gunfire at Easter ceased during communism but started to reappear again with the emergence of a democratic regime, which allowed people to freely practice their religion.<sup>65</sup>

In Dubrovnik, celebratory gunfire is part of the traditions for St. Blaise's (Sveti Vlaho) Day on 03 February. The local people have worshipped St. Blaise for over a thousand years; he is the patron saint of Dubrovnik. On 02 February, they release white pigeons outside the patron saint's church as a symbol of freedom and peace; they raise the St. Blaise flag on Orlando's Column, and the *trombunjeri* fire gunshots. The *trombunjeri* were an ancient brotherhood of cannon shooters; they participate in the opening and closing ceremonies of the Saint's Day, wearing lavish national costume and firing from traditional weapons.<sup>66</sup> There are other folklore events in Croatia, where celebratory gunfire is used, for example the Knight's Order (Viteški red kumpanjija Smokvica), on Korčula Island; the Border Guards (Otočki graničari), in Otočac; the City Guards (Građanska straža Svetog Grgura), in Požega; the Zrinski Guards (Zrinska garda), in Čakovec.<sup>67</sup>

Celebratory gunfire is common in **Kosovo**, particularly at weddings and New Year festivities. Normally the police take no action, but this largely depends on the nationality of the UNMIK police officers in charge. The international authorities will usually only intervene if members of the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) or the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) are involved in the shooting. If the perpetrators are members of the security forces they will normally face disciplinary action.<sup>68</sup>

Compared to other countries in the region celebratory gunfire is rare in **Moldova**, and only ever occurs on New Years Eve. Celebratory gunfire is most likely to occur in the autonomous Gagauz Yeri region, and in the villages, which were in the security zone for the 1992 armed conflict. These are both areas, which witnessed ethnic tensions and conflicts.

### Tragic consequences

Due to widespread availability of arms, celebratory fire periodically causes injuries and even deaths. Several examples are given below. According to police statistics, immediately after the conflict in Macedonia in 2001 and 2002, 82 persons were wounded and 17 died from gunshots at celebrations, mostly in Tetovo, but also in Gostivar and the Kumanovo regions.<sup>69</sup> At a football game in August 2005 at the main Macedonian stadium, a stray bullet hit the doctor of Cementarnica football club. The bullet was most likely to have come from celebratory gunfire at a nearby wedding.<sup>70</sup> At a village near Skopje, a one-year-old child was killed, and his aunt injured, at celebrations at an engagement ceremony.<sup>71</sup> And a stray bullet hit a young woman in the main square in Skopje during celebrations on New Year's Eve in 2005.<sup>72</sup> Similar tragic incidents occur in all the regional countries. The press still sensationalise celebratory gunfire incidents and report them as extraordinary events, which gives grounds for the claim that celebratory gunfire is an exception rather than the norm.

### 4.4.2 Guns and crime

The links between gun ownership rates and gun homicide rates are tenuous. Gun homicide rates in Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo are at least 70% of the total number of homicides, while in Moldova it is only 6%. In

<sup>65</sup> However, the public were not as tolerant of the celebratory use of armaments among other religious communities. For example, when members of the Serb minority from Slavonia celebrated their Easter with a traditional sword fight, they were accused of manifesting ethnic hatred, by their Croatian neighbours who feared the tradition threatened the security of the Croat majority.

<sup>66</sup> Cvjetković, A. *Dubrovački trombunjeri (Trombunjeri of Dubrovnik)*, Dubrovnik, 2002.

<sup>67</sup> Vitez, Z. & Muraj, A. eds. *Croatian Folk Culture. At the Crossroads of Worlds and Eras*, Zagreb, Gallery Klovićevi dvori, 2000.

<sup>68</sup> Khakee & Florquin, *Kosovo and the Gun*, p. 33.

<sup>69</sup> Lazarova, P. 'Весели сватовите од адет пукаат ама и се убиваат (Merry Wedding Guests Kill with Customary Gunfire)', *Vest*, No. 644, 31 August 2002.

<sup>70</sup> 'Фрчат заталкани свадбарски куршуми' (Stray Wedding Bullets are Flying Around), *Dnevnik*, No. 2843, 24 August 2005.

<sup>71</sup> 'Убиено едногодишно дете' (One Year Old Child Killed), *Vest*, No. 1550, 26 August 2005.

<sup>72</sup> Serafinović, M. 'Заскитан куршум ја уби Наташа Кметовска за новогодишната прослава' (Stray Bullet Killed Natasa Kmetovska at a New Year's Party), *A1 TV News*, 04 January 2005, at <<http://www.a1.com.mk/vesti/default.asp?VestID=41354>>.



Germany, gun homicides are 30% of total homicides even though 30% of its population owns a gun, compared to 7.47% in Albania and 19.38% in Montenegro (see Table 8). Thus, there do not appear to be any clear links between gun ownership levels and gun homicide rates. There are obviously many factors affecting gun homicide rates, including: the stability of the region; cultural beliefs and practices (e.g. blood feuds in some Albanian communities and the symbolic status of gun holders), which may render murder acceptable and guns the weapon of choice; the availability of guns i.e. how easy it is for a person to get hold of a gun, either by going through the legal process or acquiring one illegally; and levels of criminal activity.

Homicide rates and gun homicide rates tend to increase prior to, during, and after conflicts or periods of instability. This has occurred in Albania and Macedonia. It is most likely to also be the case for other countries of former Yugoslavia. The share of gun homicides in Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, BiH and Serbia are far higher than Europe's average (25 - 30%) and closer to those found in the United States (58%), which is considered to have a 'gun culture'.

The effects of gun proliferation unfortunately are not available but some observations can be made, although only on partial data. 200,000 guns, which were stolen in Albania, have not been accounted for and presumably are available for illegal use (of course it does not necessarily mean they are still in Albania). However, it does not seem to have had an impact on gun homicide rates. The homicide rate in Albania has nearly halved between 1995 and 2004, going from 6.46 (per 100,000 people) to 3.3. The number of attempted homicides also decreased between 1995 and 2002, going from 9.14 to 7.4. In Bulgaria, gun ownership levels doubled between 1995 and 2005, whilst the homicide rates and gun homicide rates have fallen to below pre-1995 levels. There has however been a spate of high-profile contract killings in Bulgaria; 150 such killings occurred between 2000 and 2005.<sup>73</sup> They were all committed with firearms, and related to mafia wars about smuggling channels and drug distribution territories.

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF REGISTERED GUNS PER 100 (LATEST KNOWN)	ESTIMATED TOTAL OF REGISTERED AND ILLEGAL GUNS PER 100	GUN HOMICIDE RATE (PER 100,000)	OVERALL HOMICIDE RATE (PER 100,000)	SHARE OF GUN HOMICIDES OF ALL HOMICIDES (%)
Albania	1.85	7.47	4.3	5.6	76
Kosovo	2.85	14.35	2.4	3.3	72
Montenegro	13.23	19.38	3.0	4.2	71
BiH	8.58	12.07	1.4	2.1	66
Serbia	15.22	28.24	1.4	2.4	59
Macedonia	7.63	12.52	1.3	2.3	55
Croatia	8.36	11.77	1.1	2.2	48
Germany	8.49	29.12	0.33	1.1	30
Sweden	19.93	20.23	0.65	2.45	27
Bulgaria	3.70	4.95	0.6	3.0	20
Denmark	17.58	17.58	0.23	1.21	19
Moldova	1.12	2.24	0.5	8.0	6
Romania	0.39	0.57	0.1	2.7	3

**Table 8: Firearms proliferation and homicides**

Sources: Homicide data: Romania (2001) - UNODC; Moldova (2002) - UNODC; Bulgaria (2002) - Ministry for Internal Affairs; Albania (2002) - UNODC; Croatia (2000) - WHO / Interpol; BiH (2002) - Report on Work of the Mol of the RS (Years 2002-2003), and Federation Statistical Institute, Sarajevo, (quoted in BiH SALW Survey); Macedonia (2000) - UNODC; Serbia - (2002) SALW Survey; Kosovo (2002) - UNMIK Police, quoted by SAS Kosovo and the Gun; Montenegro (2001) - SALW Survey Montenegro; Denmark (1993) - UN Firearm Study; Germany (2002) - UNODC; Sweden (2002) - UNODC; Registered firearms - SALW Surveys except Romania - Diaconu, A. Pistolarii Romaniei, *Evenimentul Zilei*, 07 March 2004; Illegal weapons data - SALW Surveys; Sweden, Germany and Denmark - Small Arms Survey 2003; Population - CIA Fact Book, at <www.cia.gov>.

<sup>73</sup> Ministry for Internal Affairs, Bulgaria.



COUNTRY	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Albania	-	-	-	-	-	-	79	75
Bulgaria	22	24	28	14	21	19	14	19
Croatia	68	48	52	-	-	-	40	29
Macedonia	-	-	-	58	47	55	-	34
Moldova	7	9	6	7	10	6	10	6
Slovenia	38	29	45	57	40	33	-	-

**Table 9: Gun homicides as a share of all homicides (%)**

Source: UNODC 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> Surveys

Evidence suggests that criminals in the former Yugoslavia and Albania, are well armed and frequently carry and use guns. Guns appear to be part of the identity of young offenders, who use their gun carrying status and the threat they might use it to create a sense of power and status, and to instil a sense of fear in others. Two young offenders from Novi Sad, in Serbia, suggest that within their 'culture' it is important to carry a gun and occasionally use it to keep up their status as people to be feared and not challenged.<sup>74</sup>

*'Everyone carries a gun after midnight in this town [Novi Sad]. This is something that everyone knows. You cannot carry it openly, but many young people occasionally carry a concealed weapon during the night. Some people always carry one or more hidden guns. Everyone knows who they are. I often see them enter a very popular bar after midnight, and the bodyguards at the entrance, who check everybody else, do not dare check them for weapons – even they know these guys are loaded with weapons and are afraid of them. These guys rarely use or show their weapons openly. Occasionally, they do show them and threaten to use them on someone in public. The word quickly gets round. These guys are famous and feared. Nobody messes with them because you would get killed.'*

*'I don't like weapons and I loathe violence... but still, it is extremely important to be feared and I had to have a reputation that helped me keep at the top. So, I occasionally carefully planned some 'incidents,' where I acted like a lunatic; I shouted loudly, I threatened people and most importantly I waved a handgun in front of people's faces. I pretended I was totally out of control and might fire at them at any moment. I then randomly fired several bullets into the wall around them. When people see a gun fired at them, they are so terrified that they will do absolutely anything you demand; your power over them is limitless... If others do not fear you, then they will quickly step on you and destroy you; rule or be ruled, that is the law of a man with the gun.'*

## 5 Representation and reproduction of guns as symbols in present-day SEE

The symbolic meanings attached to certain objects, actions and beliefs are often difficult to recognise or to quantify because they are so embedded within a society's culture that they go unnoticed and are taken for granted as part of everyday life by society, and outsiders. This section looks at the way guns are represented by mainstream society and the symbolic values societies give to guns.

### 5.1 Guns and masculinity

In general, guns in SEE are associated with manhood and masculinity. Therefore, to understand the gun's role in defining gender roles it is necessary to consider the way guns define male – female relationships and define the man's role in the family and in society more generally. Of equal importance to consider are guns as a symbol of particular male attributes, for example, the man as the hunter and provider for his family, the protector of family honour and security, and as somebody who is able to exert power in society, and control over women. Many things will influence the role of guns in gender definitions in a society at a particular time. Recent armed

<sup>74</sup> One to one interviews with two young offenders (one nearly 18, the other just over 18) who were both male, and known to the police and social services because of violent behaviour.



**Box 4: Historical note**

Balkan folklore has quite a few songs and tales about female haidouks or rebel-leaders. This may be because Ottoman laws did not prohibit women joining the army or carrying weapons. There are cases of female timariotes, who were women who owned and managed property in exchange for military duties. The wives and widows of auxiliary and special troops (like the martoloses, derbendci, dogandci, dzanbazes) were also counted as military personnel. This granted women the right to use their husbands' arms and ammunition.

Source: Todorova, O. *Women in the Central Balkans During the Ottoman Era (15-17 century)* Sofia, Guttenberg, 2004, p.279-292)

conflicts will certainly have had an impact. The extent to which guns define gender constructs i.e. views of manhood and masculinity will undoubtedly affect the ease with which SALW control can work.

Most gun related activities are male oriented. Hunting is almost exclusively a male activity. For example, the Moldovan Society of Hunters and Fishermen (HFS) has 12,100 male members and only four women. The level of machismo in hunting associations excludes females even from preparing the kill for eating, since men gathered in Hunter's Houses prefer to retain exclusively male company. In

small towns in Croatia a man risks being ridiculed if he resists becoming a hunter and joining a local hunting society. Sports shooting and celebratory gunfire are also generally male dominated activities. Virtually all gun homicides are committed by males and it is usually men who use illegal weapons in bar or gang fights and mob assassinations.

COUNTRY	MALE (%)	FEMALE (%)	GUNS PER 100 POPULATION (ILLEGAL AND LEGAL)
BiH	16	36	1.07
Bulgaria	30	51	4.95
Kosovo*	23.6	21.7	19.38
Macedonia	N/A	N/A	12.52
Moldova	30	43	2.24
Montenegro	15	51	14.35
Serbia	48	N/A	14.08

\* The Kosovo Survey was not representative for women.

**Table 10: What is the main reason your household would NOT choose to own a firearm? - 'I don't like guns in general'**

Source: HHS; Gun ownership rates - Table 6.

However, this does not mean guns are essential in defining manhood or masculinity in SEE. It may be important in some sub-cultures, for example in certain criminal groups, and in certain rural and mountainous areas especially where all the male inhabitants in a village have traditionally used guns for hunting. In general, most men in the region are unarmed and they do not feel their masculinity is challenged or threatened by being unarmed.



**Figure 6 - Securicor Guards, Bulgaria**

The number of women in the army, police, or PSCs is still negligible, although the situation is changing in some of the territories and countries in the region. In Serbia, in Novi Sad all traffic police patrols are now male - female pairs and most of the high ranking police officers working with young offenders are also female in Novi Sad. Sports shooting also attracts a few female participants. It was a very popular sport during the communist regimes, and the regional countries entered numerous female participants for sports shooting at the Olympic Games and other world championships. However, it

seems to have had little effect in attracting women to engage in weapons-related activities. It remains to be seen whether an increase in the number of women in the police and the army, as part of EU and NATO enlargement processes, will help gradually to change the view that guns are strictly a male domain.

There are no national statistics on the gender of gun owners but the HHS allows an assessment of the gendered attitudes towards guns (see Table 10). Respondents were asked to state if they would *not* own a firearm because they do not like guns. The results vary from country to country. Countries or territories with lower gun ownership had a higher percentage of men who did not like guns, i.e. Moldova and Bulgaria, and the difference between male and female attitudes was smaller. The attitude of women in countries with higher levels of gun ownership



was similar to women in countries with low levels of gun ownership. However, there was a more pronounced difference between the male and female attitudes in these countries. For example in Bulgaria, 30% of men and 51% of women did not like guns. While in Montenegro where gun ownership levels are far higher (14.35% compared to 4.95% in Bulgaria) 15% of men and 51% of women did not like guns. In other words gun ownership is largely a male phenomenon in territories and countries with higher levels of gun ownership, such as Montenegro and Serbia.

The gender divide between male and female perceptions of guns and their experiences with them is highlighted by results from Albania: 58% of female respondents said the reason they would not get a gun was that they did not know how to use one, compared to only 14.9% of men; 74% of female respondents and 32.7% of male respondents said they were afraid of guns.

Guns used to have a role in rites of passage rituals in the mountainous areas of Northern Albania and Montenegro, although empirical evidence about it is scarce. In Albania, before 1912, weapons were an essential part of a man's attire. They would wear a long rifle called an *arnautka*, and a short sword or a couple of pistols in their belt. When a boy reached 12 to 15 years old, there was a special family ritual, where his father presented his son with these traditional weapons and taught him how to maintain them and how to shoot accurately.<sup>75</sup> Fathers traditionally pass guns down to their sons as family heirlooms, in rural areas of Macedonia, where the population is predominantly Albanian.

### Box 5: The 'Sworn Virgins'

The strong links between guns and masculinity, in some parts of former Yugoslavia and Albania, is illustrated by the phenomenon of the 'sworn virgins.' The sworn virgins were women from families with no male children. The women had to adopt the appearance, behaviour and lifestyle of their male peers, to fulfil their parents' and community's expectations. Until recently this practice could be found in some rural areas of Montenegro, Southern Serbia, Albania and Kosovo. There are still 'sworn virgins' in the highlands of Northern Albanian.

In these strong patriarchal societies, gender played a significant role. Families with no male heir required a woman to take on the male's role of being head of the family. It was partly an economic factor of transferring property or marking property boundaries (p. 5). It was also important to have someone to take up arms, if necessary, and to defend the family honour through blood feuds. Interviews with some 'sworn virgins' revealed the significant role of their gun in developing their masculine image. One 'sworn virgin' said her greatest regret was letting the 'communists take away her horse and her gun' (p. 77). Another interviewee was declined a hunting license, and was not allowed to join the local shooting club, despite being an excellent marksman (p. 49).

Source: Antonia Young, *Women Who Become Men: Albanian Sworn Virgins*, Oxford, GBR: Berg Publishers, 2000.



Figure 7 - Sworn Virgins

Sources: Dr. Schultz, E. *Albanisches Mannweibertum*, Die Woche – Moderne Illustrierte Zeitschrift, Vol. IV (40-52) No. 40 pp.1758-1763, Berlin, 1907. Re-published in Horvath, A D. A Tangle of Multiple Transgressions: The Western Gaze and the Tobelija (Balkan Sworn-Virgin-Cross-Dressers) in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, *Anthropology Matters*, 2003 - 2.

<sup>75</sup> *Fjalori enciklopedik shqiptar*, p. 44.



Although armed conflicts have strengthened some male stereotypes, with the glorification of male war heroes in former Yugoslavia, it is also possible to see that armed conflicts have transformed the traditional association of guns with men and masculinity. One example is the story of a Bosnian refugee woman: when her husband went to fight he left his handgun with her so she could use it as a last resort to protect herself and their children if they were attacked by the enemy.<sup>76</sup> Another story is from some field research in Kosovo, when a paramilitary commander from Kosovo said that young Albanian women would come over from Macedonia to fight during the 1999 war and they were among the best snipers he had seen. He said the women were treated with great respect and the unit commanders made sure that *'their honour was preserved, and that they were sent back to their parents so that they could marry as respectable women.'*<sup>77</sup>

## 5.2 Representation of guns in cultural institutions

National museums often present guns as symbols of victory, independence and freedom. Gun collections can be used to remind people of a country's previous military victories and defeats. They can help to shape and reproduce people's identities and perceptions of belonging to a nation and state, especially when a country or territory was created or maintained with war and arms.

All museums in the region have weapons collections. The Military Museum in Sofia, Bulgaria has over a million items in its collection, including several tens of thousands of small arms. Around the country, history and military museums display guns as part of 19<sup>th</sup> century 'traditional' male attire. The weapon collection at the Croatian History Museum is one of the largest and most varied collections, with specimens of weapons used in the region from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. It holds some 4,000 items, ranging from the oldest manufactured guns in the 15<sup>th</sup> century to contemporary guns. The collection is also accessible on-line. The Skopje Museum has a collection of SALW. They even asked for the weapons collected in the *Essential Harvest* operation to be donated to the museum rather than be destroyed.<sup>78</sup> History and military museums displaying significant weapons collections also exist in Serbia, Albania, Romania, and Moldova.

## 5.3 Representation of guns by public figures

Public figures, with their high visibility and role as opinion leaders, play an influential role in promoting the level of acceptance of weapons. Party elites during the communist regimes were able to access weapons at a time when most people were denied the right. Today guns and some gun related activities, especially hunting, are associated with elite groups of politicians and businesspersons. In Bulgaria, communist party leaders were well known for their apparent love of hunting, and even though hunting has become more accessible, if one can afford it, the image of the hunting elite continues to capture the popular imagination. Antique guns, which some groups consider as status symbols, are a common gift for businesspersons and politicians at birthdays and special events. Newspapers usually report on these exchanges, further reproducing guns as a status symbol.

In some of the regional territories and countries, guns are used as a means to exert political influence, but whether with success is a separate matter. Most notably, in Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo, small groups of party activists hold legal weapons licences that they received when their affiliated political parties were in power. The political parties would issue licenses to supporters, irrespective of the licensing procedures.<sup>79</sup> In Macedonia, during the 2002 electoral campaign it became evident that the two current opposition parties keep armed groups of loyalists, when various violent incidences broke out.<sup>80</sup> The attack on the Democratic Union of Integration,<sup>81</sup> in March 2002, proves that political groups are capable of serious violence. The repercussions are that people could associate weapons as a legitimate means of gaining power and authority.

<sup>76</sup> Interviews with refugee women, conducted by a psychologist in the Humanitarian Centre Novi Sad, Serbia, 2004.

<sup>77</sup> Zhelyazkova, A. *Albanian Prospects. Fieldwork*, Sofia, IMIR, 2003, pp. 120-153.

<sup>78</sup> Skopje Museum Asked For The 'Harvested' Weapons *Dnevnik*, 30 August 2001.

<sup>79</sup> Matveeva et al., *Macedonia: Guns, Policing and Ethnic Division*, p. 29.

<sup>80</sup> It is believed that both of the opposition parties: the VMRO-DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party of the Macedonian National Unity), and the DPA (Democratic Party of Albanians), keep armed groups of loyalists.

<sup>81</sup> Following a general amnesty granted in early 2002, some of the former NLA rebels moved into mainstream politics by forming a new ethnic Albanian political party, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI). Microsoft Encarta Reference Library, Microsoft Corporation, 2005.





During the conflicts in former Yugoslavia, it was extremely common to see politicians carrying guns in public. Politicians and popular figures frequently appeared in public in military uniform, sometimes waving handguns and even assault rifles. This was especially true for the radical nationalist parties: Vojislav Seselj, leader of the nationalist Serbian Radical Party, was famous for threatening his political opponents and critics with a handgun. He was also photographed in 1991 with his own paramilitary unit in torn-down Vukovar, posing with a machine gun in his hand. The notorious criminal and paramilitary leader, Zeljko Raznatovic Arkan, who founded and led the Serbian Unity Party, was often seen parading in his military uniform and toting his weapons. In Croatia, many people perceived members of the Croatian Army, and the paramilitary groups associated with the Croatian Party of Rights, as public heroes and role models. Even politicians, who were not part of the military structure, would proudly appear in public in uniforms and with firearms. The frequency of these public displays of weaponry decreased dramatically after the conflicts ended. This could be because politicians and military figures were using firearms, as symbols of independence and freedom, to mobilise the masses for the war effort and to make the war more acceptable to the public. How these behaviours and images of guns have impacted on the way guns are represented today is debatable.



**Figure 8 – Vojislav Seselj**  
Source: Sobaka, 2004

In recent times there have been different reasons why politicians have appeared in public with guns for media attention. They have usually done it to show support for, and publicise domestic arms production. The Croatian Minister for Internal Affairs, Ivica Kirin, allowed journalists to photograph him with guns on a visit to a Croatian arms factory (HS Produkt, in Karlovac). The Bulgarian President, Georgi Parvanov, is a big supporter of the domestic arms industry. Photographs of him testing new SALW products from domestic defence companies (e.g. Arsenal JSC and Arcus JSC), and examining new hunting rifles at gun exhibitions, often make the front page of newspapers. The Deputy Prime Minister, Lydia Shuleva, has also been pictured with guns several times in newspapers. Other figures have also publicly linked themselves to guns. Prince Leka, son of the former Albanian King Zog, made it known he was passionate about carrying and collecting guns.<sup>82</sup> Retired General Boyko Borissov, who is the second most popular politician in Bulgaria, was frequently pictured in newspapers with his police firearm visibly tucked in its holster while he was still the head of the police.<sup>83</sup> In Moldova, public figures come together dressed in military style uniforms or with personal pistols, hunting guns, or arms collection for two types of events; to mark the beginning of the hunting season and at celebrations for former war veterans (from WWII, the Afghan War, or the Transdniestrian conflict). These public behaviours by prominent men, and some women, will affect the way that people perceive guns. It is possible that such displays will suggest that guns are acceptable accessories for people in positions of power and authority.

Police, security guards and military personnel are visible figures in society and since in SEE they are generally armed they will also influence the way guns are represented in society. For example, if police, security guards or military personnel are an everyday sight for people it may mean that guns become part of everyday life for people. The impact this will have on people's perceptions of guns will depend on the context of the situation. The effect of militarization, exposure to paramilitaries and an increased presence of armed personnel in areas that have been through conflict, requires further research. People in the countries of former Yugoslavia have had a great deal of experience with the aforementioned - the presence of paramilitaries or rebel groups, such as the National Liberation Army (NLA) in Macedonia, or the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in Kosovo, have certainly influenced the public's perceptions of civilian gun ownership. However further field research or HHS is needed to be able to draw any conclusions about the influence of different security personnel on society's cultural affiliation with guns. A high visibility of people in law enforcement positions carrying guns may well reinforce the view that guns are necessary to maintain a just and safe environment. A focus group of businessmen in Chisinau seemed to feel that gun ownership was necessary for self-protection. All of the focus group participants had guns, apart

<sup>82</sup> Personal interview by Elton Skendaj with Ismet Drenova, Chief of Technology Department, Institute of Research and Design for Arms, conducted in Tirana on 11 November 2005.

<sup>83</sup> He was also a former head of the police, and became the Mayor of Sofia in October 2005.



from one who said that he was planning to buy one. They said they possessed guns for personal security reasons and that their perception was that 'the large majority' (90%) of businesspersons possess guns.<sup>84</sup>

## 5.4 Guns and Popular Culture

### 5.4.1 Representation of guns in the media

Print and electronic media are probably the most influential ways of shaping and reinforcing either positive or negative images of guns. Governments in the former Yugoslavia and in Moldova used electronic media as a propaganda tool in the 1990s, to mobilize popular support. Television broadcasters often used to show political and military leaders, and heroes, carrying guns. Specialized journals have appeared in recent years catering for hunters, gun lovers, and military people across SEE. These only cater for specialist groups and not the public but it is easy for a wider audience to access specialized television channels and shows for gun users. There have been no studies to analyse the impact of the overwhelming presence of arms on the television, the internet, or in the print media.



Figure 9 – Hunting Manual, Serbia  
Source: Lovački savez Srbije, 2004

**Serbia** has two hunting journals: 'Lovacke novine' (Hunter's Newspaper) and 'Trag' (Trail). They are usually distributed to subscribers only. There are two gun magazines: the irregularly published 'Kalibar,' (Calibre) and the relatively new and quite popular 'Centurion.' 'Centurion,' is an expensive, high quality magazine with articles such as, 'Russian Lady for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,' detailing the new technological innovations in the Russian AK-47 rifle and 'Death that Whispers' which tells readers how to select and use a gun-silencer. It also advertises local and world arms trade fairs. The 'Vojska' (Army) newspaper caters for military personnel.<sup>85</sup> Most newspapers have adverts selling civilian firearms.

The print media in **Croatia** does not really mention weapons, apart from the news sections on criminal acts and felonies.<sup>86</sup> Occasionally the media has a public debate about whether gun ownership should be prohibited in the interests of public safety. They usually happen after there has been a spate of shooting sprees in public places, for example in a courtroom, a bank or a social welfare centre. The Ministry of Defence publishes a magazine for the army called, 'Hrvatski Vojnik' (Croatian Soldier). It includes regular information on new technology regarding arms. There are a few specialised journals, distributed to subscribers only, with information on new weapons: 'Lovački vjesnik' (Hunter's Journal); 'Glas lova i ribolova' (Bulletin on hunting and fishing) in Slavonija and 'Dobra kob' for Dalmatia. There are no regular adverts for guns in the mass media. The one exception is a recent advert for a Croatian arms manufacturer, whose firearms were recently included in a campaign to promote Croatian products. It was published in all print and electronic media in Croatia.<sup>87</sup>

There are on-line discussions, but mainly concerning sports shooting and weapon models information for computer games.<sup>88</sup> There is some other coverage; for example the most popular news portal, Iskon, recently published an article about NBA player Karl Malone being a passionate gun owner.

An analysis of print media in **Macedonia** showed little or no discussion of gun ownership or hunting issues and no specialized journals. There were no adverts for guns, gun stores, or shooting ranges, and only a few articles focusing on guns and warfare, celebratory gunfire and traditional rituals involving firearms. The Macedonian print media has been critical of the traditional involvement of politicians and diplomats in hunting. President

<sup>84</sup> Focus Group in Chisinau, conducted in November 2005 by the Institute for Public Policy.

<sup>85</sup> See <<http://www.vj.yu/publikacije/Vojska/broj540/v540.htm>>.

<sup>86</sup> Dijagnoza za trostrukog ubojicu: Smije imati oružje, (Diagnosis for a Triple Killer: Can Carry Weapons), *Jutarnji list*, 25 March 2005.

<sup>87</sup> *Akcija Kupujmo Hrvatsko* (Lets Buy Croatian Products Campaign), at <[http://www.hgk.hr/znakovi/izvorno/Pistolj\\_HS2000\\_XD.asp](http://www.hgk.hr/znakovi/izvorno/Pistolj_HS2000_XD.asp)>.

<sup>88</sup> For example, Counter Strike game site at <<http://cs.gamer.hr/vodici/oruzja.php>> and Game Play game site at <<http://www.gameplay.hr>>.



Branko Crvenkovski, decided to discontinue his 'diplomatic hunt' and set up a Park of Tolerance, where foreign dignitaries can plant flowers. The initiative won praise from the local media.<sup>89</sup>

In **Moldova** the mass media often publish articles, stories, features and news dedicated to security issues (e.g. UN Disarmament or Security and State), which then have an impact on people's perceptions of guns. Ironically, the most structured and regular promoters of positive images of guns are the government-run media. Gun related stories are published by the state in the weekly newspaper 'Oastea Moldovei' (Moldova's Army), and in another magazine edited by the Ministry of Defence. 'La datorie' ('On duty') is broadcast monthly on a public television channel and there is also a weekly radio programme broadcast on a public national radio station. The Ministry of Defence frequently releases news where the key element of the story is about a soldier's capacity to manipulate, shoot or maintain his rifle.

In **Bulgaria** the image of the hunting elite continues to capture the popular imagination, even though hunting is slightly more accessible today than it was during the communist regime. A leading daily newspaper recently devoted a double-page spread to examining the hunting habits of key politicians and business leaders, including the weapons they used. With these types of publications the media is reproducing the image of hunting as an activity of the powerful and successful in society.

#### **5.4.2 Representation of guns in popular music**

A tiny share of all popular music produced in SEE has lyrics which mention guns or promote illegal use of gun. Songs that do have gun related lyrics tend to reflect violent realities, like conflicts or organized crime. As such, the lyrics are more a consequence of prolific gun ownership and use rather than a tool for promoting gun ownership and use.

However, in the 1990s a number of songs were used to mobilise people for the war effort and thus promote violent gun use, in the countries of former Yugoslavia. This rhetoric has remained particularly strong in turbo-folk songs (the preferred choice for the average Balkan person). The link between nationalism and turbo-folk was most blatant when Zeljko Arkan, gangster and war criminal, married Ceca Velickovic, a leading turbo-folk star. The event attracted enormous media coverage.



**Figure 10 – Ceca Velickovic and Zeljko Raznatovic-Arkan**

Source: Free Serbia, January 2000

There are also a couple of songs from before the 1990s conflicts that refer to the acceptability of violent gun use and the gun as a symbol of masculinity. A very popular rock band called Riblja corba (Fish Soup) had a hit in the mid-1980s, called 'Don't Go Walking Down My Street' (Nemoj da ides mojom ulicom). Some of the lyrics were:

*'I have bought a gun from a smuggler on the black market  
I will use a bullet on you with pleasure  
So don't go walking down my street.'*

The ease of buying a gun and the perceived power of the gun was implied in the lyrics of a song by a popular Belgrade band called Partibrejkers (Party-breakers):

*'I have bought a gun I have bought a [wedding] ring  
One of these two I will throw into a river  
You could have been mine, but you did not dare to.'*

More recently, songs from the countries of former Yugoslavia associate guns with gangsters / mafia, who are the new (anti) 'heroes' of the Balkans. The songs tell how a low-class tough guy, quickly builds up respect and

<sup>89</sup> Место дипломатски лов - парк на толеранција (Instead of Diplomatic Hunt – Park of Tolerance), *Utrinski Vesnik*, No.1730, 19 March 2005.



success in the criminal underworld by brandishing a gun in his hand. This is evident in 'Gile the Champ' (Gile Sampion), sung by the band Zabranjeno pusenje (No Smoking):

*'He wanted all and he wanted it now  
With a little help from the Silver Beretta  
It is a short path from the prodigal son  
To the cocaine king.'*

In **BiH**, 'Cannon' (Top) by a Bosnian group called Bijelo dugme (White Button), tells how someone will buy a canon to shoot the girl of his choice, if that was what it took to make her his.

In **Croatia** in the 1990s, some music groups used gun imagery to glorify war and nationalism in Croatia. The singer Marko Perković, was also known by the name of Thomson, which is a gun brand. His songs were about the victory of Croats over Serb rebels, and frequently mentioned guns, bombs and Kalashnikovs. His music is still quite popular in Dalmatia, which is an economically underdeveloped region where ethnic tensions remain high. There are also singers like Edo Maajka, who condemn ethnic hatred and nationalism.

In **Moldova**, old folk songs 'cintece de catanie' glorify military service in the former Red Army and refer to guns as a symbol of service.

In **Bulgaria**, rap and hip-hop music are the only types of music that mention guns. It is clearly influenced by similar music in the United States, where the music is an expression of gang sub-cultures. However, the social conditions that led to gang sub-cultures in the United States are not present in Bulgaria and the music has had no real influence on crime or increased rates of gun possession amongst young people.

In **Albania**, traditional hunting songs have been included in modern videos. The old version focuses on hunting animals, while in the modern version, the young men are dressed in fatigues, carrying hunting rifles and ready to go hunting, but they are also trying to court a beautiful girl at the same time. They have added additional meaning to the gun as a symbol of masculinity through the courtship aspect of the video.

### 5.4.3 Representation of guns in computer games



Figure 11 – Counter-Strike

Computer games have become one of the most powerful media for widening knowledge about guns among young people in SEE, and they are likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. There are no studies that have examined, either how many people are actively involved or exposed to computer games in the region, or the links between computer games, gun use and gun violence. Research in the United States has shown that young people who play violent computer games show more aggression to their peers than those who have not played them.<sup>90</sup> However, Internet and computer access in SEE is much lower than in OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries. This means that computer games as a means of reproducing images of illegal gun use and possession as acceptable are of less concern than in other areas of the world.

Counter-Strike is one of the most prominent games in SEE (see Figure 11); it is also very popular in the rest of Europe and the United States. It is a game where terrorists and counter-terrorists engage in warfare, using an assortment of arms and tactics. Users can even aspire to compete in regional, national and global Counter-Strike tournaments. Several websites are dedicated to the

<sup>90</sup> Walsh, D. *Video Game Violence and Public Policy*, 'Playing by the Rules: The Cultural Policy Challenges of Video Games Conference,' Chicago, 26-27 October 2002.



game, providing detailed descriptions of arms, usually direct from gun store websites and including the price they are sold at.<sup>91</sup> There are also online forums to exchange ideas and game tactics.

One computer game that does appear to deliberately manipulate the representation of guns in order to send out a nationalistic message is a Serbian game called 'Back to Kosovo.' The story line is based on a Serbian paramilitary soldier fighting in Kosovo during the 1999 war, who is ordered to return to Serbia after the Kumanovo Agreement. He then receives a new command seven years later to go 'Back to Kosovo!' equipped with a wide range of arsenal of handguns, rifles and a rocket launcher, which are all described in detail.<sup>92</sup>

Games like these mean that users may have a far wider knowledge about guns (which they have accessed via socially acceptable channels), and it has created a wide group of people who socially engage with others through a computer game which focuses on violence and guns. However, it is not possible to say whether this has caused outbreaks of violence, or made gun ownership or illegal gun use more culturally acceptable. What may be relevant is that the majority of computer users and gun owners / users are in different age brackets, but this may change in the longer term.

## **6 Country Findings**

### **6.1 Albania**

There is much truth in the assertion that guns were important in the lives of Albanian highlanders living in autonomous and isolated communities in the past. However, the idea of a 'culturally motivated affiliation to guns' is not an adequate conceptual framework to understand the complex reasons why people own and use guns. Historical, political and social events have had a huge impact on people's perceptions of guns. Customary laws about honour and living in small self-sufficient communities reproduced the gun as an indispensable tool for achieving personal, and at times community security and justice. The forced suppression of old norms and customary ways that occurred during the creation of a modern nation-state in the 20<sup>th</sup> century led to new norms related to the state's monopoly on force. In the last decade, the dissolution of the totalitarian state and weak political and economic institutions have left the average individual feeling insecure. The recent proliferation of illicit civilian weapons reflects this insecurity, rather than an inherent cultural affinity towards weapons.

The significance of the gun in a wide range of rituals (weddings, births, religious celebrations) was common up until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The exception is celebratory gunfire, which still occurs, but this has more to do with availability of weapons and a low level of respect for state law than with tradition. Although a recourse to traditions (including patriarchal ones), such as the Kanun or *besa*, has been strong in the face of mounting insecurity in the period after 1997, the relative success of weapons collections indicates that the present improvement of the security situation will likely reverse some of the negative effects of weapons possession.

### **Disarmament and gun control policies**

Gun possession, legal or illegal, is largely connected to personal security. Difficulties in disarmament or collection programmes have much less to do with the prevailing cultural attitudes, than with an uncertain political and security situation. In some highland regions, particularly in the North, tradition could be invoked as a justification for preserving the privileged status given to weapon-owners. This is likely to change fairly quickly under conditions of continued stabilization in the country, coupled with a rising standard of living, better law enforcement and governance, and above all, an improved security situation.

### **6.2 Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The perception that BiH is a gun-crazy society, where only the presence of international forces prevents new outbreaks of hostilities, can be supported by a number of convincing arguments, but it is questionable whether

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<sup>91</sup> See the Croatian Counter-Strike website at <<http://cs.gamer.hr/vodici/oruzja.php>>. Many Counter-Strike game players in Moldova are involved in a Russian web space that displays weapons and the prices they are sold at. See <<http://gamerclub.ru/orujie.php>>.

<sup>92</sup> See <<http://www.nspoint.net/~kalaj/oruzje.htm>>.



any of these are related to tradition and culture. The country continues to deal with consequences of the 1992 - 1995 war, manifested primarily through an increasing number of former soldiers who are diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and who are committing gun crimes with illegal firearms, which is a far more likely explanation for gun homicide rates than tradition. In addition, many war-affected areas continue to be economically underdeveloped with unemployment three times higher than the national average, which also contributes to tension and outbreaks of violence.

Guns are not central to any important rituals or customs. The occasional use of celebratory gunfire is more an independent action of some gun owners, rather than an integral part of rituals. There are a low number of people who cite tradition as a reason for gun ownership and possibly because of the war, there are a relatively high number of individuals (48%) who will not own a gun because they are dangerous i.e. they also see them as culturally unacceptable. Sustained ethnic tensions between the Serbs, Muslims and Croats in BiH are both a cause, and an effect, of the vast quantities of illegal weapons on all sides.

### **Disarmament and gun control policies**

Gun possession, legal or illegal, is largely connected to personal security and feelings of uncertainty over what will happen if the international forces leave, as well as the fear of a 'domino effect' linked to the still unresolved issue of Kosovo. Difficulties in disarmament or collection programs are thus not connected to any prevailing cultural attitudes, but are almost entirely a result of the uncertain political and security situation. About 70% of people believe that others would turn in their weapons if security improves and the other ethnic communities are disarmed as well.

## **6.3 Bulgaria**

Guns have a very limited influence on cultural practices in Bulgaria. Continuous restrictive government policies have restricted civilian gun possession only to hunters, private security guards, and a small number of target shooters. Guns are not central to any rituals and celebratory fire at such events is definitely an exception, rather than a norm. One exception may be in some areas of the Rhodope mountains, where gunfire might still be practiced as part of marriage ceremonies. Hunting and sports shooting are well established in Bulgaria but are controlled and do not promote illegal use or ownership.

### **Disarmament and gun control policies**

It can be stated with certainty that no cultural practices should be taken into account when implementing disarmament or SALW Awareness policies.

## **6.4 Croatia**

There are a number of traditional practices among the Catholic Croats that render gunfire acceptable at Christmas and Easter celebrations. However undesirable they might seem, they should not be considered a serious cause for concern. These events tend to now, as a rule, be public affairs with large media coverage and a live audience meaning they are also strictly regulated and ceremonial in character. As a result, they do not represent any social danger and their influence on irresponsible behaviour by gun users is negligible. A more serious menace and growing threat is the celebratory gunfire that regularly accompanies the victory of Croatian sports teams. Generally the open display of guns is considered socially inappropriate.

The region most strongly influenced by firearms is the historic Military frontier of the Dinaric Mountains region along the present-day border between Croatia and BiH, particularly the mountainous areas of Gorski Kotar and Lika. The local population uses weapons for hunting and to protect their livestock and property. The highest number of weapons per capita is found in the mountainous regions (i.e. Ličko-Senjska županija),<sup>93</sup> where the relative remoteness of the area preserved a patriarchal and often violent life-style in these regions well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However the accelerated construction of highways in Croatia, the country's effort to enter the EU and above all, the pearl in the Croatian economy – tourism - are transforming this part of Croatia at a very fast

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<sup>93</sup> Data collected on 12 December 2004, from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Croatia.



pace. Tradition, as much as it still plays a role in arms proliferation, will soon cease to be a factor as mainstream society makes such gun practices unacceptable.

### **Disarmament and gun control policies**

Illegal gun possession is mostly linked to the criminal underworld or personal security. Gunfire at sports events poses a greater threat to public safety than religiously motivated gunfire. Religiously motivated celebratory gunfire should be disregarded when implementing disarmament, and SALW Awareness policies.

## **6.5 Macedonia**

Macedonia cannot be defined as having a high level of cultural acceptance of guns. Guns are not central to any important rituals or customs. Occasional celebratory gunfire is the act of independent individuals rather than an integral part of any rituals. Regions of the country with a predominantly Albanian population are reportedly more armed, but this reflects the security situation and criminal activities, or a strong nationalist sentiment, rather than being an intricate part of cultural practices and institutions.

### **Disarmament and gun control policies**

Gun possession, legal or illegal, is largely connected to personal insecurity and distrust in government, military, or police forces. When implementing disarmament and SALW Awareness policies, particularly in Albanian populated areas, personal security and trust-building issues should be taken into account.

## **6.6 Moldova**

In Moldova there are no rituals or customs that play a central role in gun ownership and use. Celebratory gunfire is rarely observed. Since WWII gun ownership has been strictly restricted by the state and despite armed conflicts between 1990 and 1992, the subsequent weapons collection and disarmament projects managed to keep gun-ownership levels low. Gun violence is low even though Moldova has the highest murder rate in SEE.

### **Disarmament and gun control policies**

Gun possession, legal or illegal, is largely connected to fear of crime and potential conflict, especially in the areas bordering the unrecognized breakaway territory of Transnistria. Disarmament or SALW Awareness policies should not be impeded by any cultural practices.

## **6.7 Serbia and Montenegro**

### **6.7.1 Serbia**

Similar to Albania and BiH, Serbia has a relatively high cultural acceptance of guns in society in some areas. Warfare and armed struggle for national liberation and expansion have played an exceptional role in its national history. In contrast with Bulgaria, Serbia emerged victorious from most of its wars, giving rise to the belief that 'drawing a gun' is beneficial. In the present day, Serbia has probably one of the highest rates of gun ownership in Europe (and is the most armed in Central and Eastern Europe) with an estimated 28 firearms per 100 individuals. The majority of households are in effect armed. With 59% of homicides committed with a firearm, the country certainly is closer to a classic 'gun culture', such as the US, than the rest of Europe. The high rates of firearm possession translate into high visibility of firearms and public acceptability.

In certain regions of Serbia, gunfire is part of some rituals such as weddings. Reports about guests being wounded by gunshots at weddings seem to be slightly too numerous to be considered accidental, and celebratory gunfire is witnessed far more often than in other countries or territories in the region (39.8%). The resurgence of patriarchal and male-dominated attitudes after 1989 as well as the strengthening of men's position in society during the wars, makes gun ownership a largely male phenomenon.



Possession of firearms is perceived as part of 'tradition' by 15%. This corresponds closely to strong nationalist sentiment in the country, and popularity of folklore in music, education, or politics. However, the worrying levels of gun ownership and use in Serbia are much more the legacy of a decade of lawlessness and complete criminalization of the state under Milosevic than 'tradition.' For over a decade, organized crime effectively ruled Serbia in close cooperation with Milosevic's regime, which relied on the mafia to keep the country going during the period of international sanctions.<sup>94</sup> The assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic revealed how deeply Serbia was entangled in organized crime. This was followed by 'Operation Sabre,' a highly successful weapons collection, collecting around 50,000 weapons. This shows that effective law enforcement and above all, public support for the government's actions can easily overcome any alleged 'traditional' affiliation to weapons. The long-lasting state of lawlessness in Serbia has convinced the majority of Serbs that guns and gun owners bring trouble. A third of respondents in Serbia believe that people do not register their weapons because they do not wish to be recorded as gun owners.<sup>95</sup> This could of course mean that they intend to use their weapons for illegal activities, but it could also mean that owning guns is deemed socially unacceptable. Popular support for a significant reduction in the number of guns in Serbia therefore significantly outweighs the power of 'tradition.'

### **Disarmament and gun control policies**

Though the level of gun ownership is high, it is comparable to other European countries, particularly Scandinavia. The country's gun crime rates are likely to continue to fall with political and economic stabilization. Further efforts to register firearms or collect firearms would most likely not be hampered by tradition, which has long since ceased to be an influential factor, especially in the urban areas. Disarmament may be harder in Southern Serbia, especially in the 'problematic' municipalities of Medvedja, Bujanovac and Preshevo, where there is some cultural affiliation to guns, but more of an issue are the interethnic tensions and widespread distrust of authorities, especially among the Albanian population. Celebratory gunfire could be reduced through strengthening legislation and tougher law enforcement. It is unlikely, though, to bring its levels down in the short term due to its widespread public acceptability.

### **6.7.2 Montenegro**

Just like Serbia, Montenegro has a very high level of gun ownership (19.38 per 100 population). Tradition and customary laws continued to be important well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The gun homicide rate is high (71% of all homicides). Most tellingly, Montenegro is the only place where a significant number of respondents (21.8%) cited 'tradition' as a reason for owning weapons.<sup>96</sup> Montenegro is in fact, in its own mythical national history, a 'nation of warriors' and a home to the saying 'A house is not a home without a gun.' With between 126,000 and 175,000 weapons in civilian hands, it means that over a quarter of the population of Montenegro is armed.

Sports shooting used to play a significant part in strengthening the perceptions of Montenegro as the 'traditional' land of shooters and gun owners. In fact, 'self-conscious' traditionalism seems to be stronger here than in any other country. Folklore and nationalism seem to play a significant part in strengthening such attitudes. Distrust in state security providers is an important issue that stimulates gun ownership. There are also indications that a strong sense of individualism and independence played an important role in stimulating gun ownership in the past, but there are no systematic studies of the present situation.

Little has remained of the rituals and customs where guns play a central part. Although it is not clear how celebratory gunfire compares to other countries or how often people observe it, the SALW Survey of Montenegro reports it is common and largely perceived as legitimate and acceptable. Generally, the reasons for gun possession are similar to the ones in other countries of the region.

### **Disarmament and gun control policies**

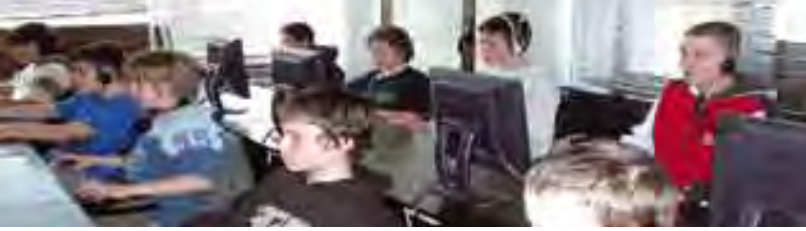
Although tradition might be a much more serious obstacle to disarmament efforts than in most of the other countries, it is far from being the most pressing problem. The uncertain political future of Montenegro (with the

<sup>94</sup> See for example *Partners in Crime: The Risks of Symbiosis between the Security Sector and Organized Crime in Southeast Europe*, Sofia, Centre for the Study of Democracy, 2004.

<sup>95</sup> Taylor et al, *Living with the Legacy – SALW Survey of Republic of Serbia*, p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> Florquin & Stoneman, 'A house isn't a home without a gun' - *SALW Survey of Republic of Montenegro*, p. 23.





referendum on independence planned for May 2006), the unresolved status of Kosovo and unstable situation in neighbouring BiH and high levels of organized crime continue to erode trust in state institutions and its law enforcement agencies. This can make people believe that 'traditional' methods of self-protection are still necessary. This traditional way of thinking is a consequence, rather than a cause of the political and socio-economic situation, therefore such entrenched cultural attitudes could be sidelined if the issues fuelling the situation were resolved.

### 6.7.3 Kosovo

Kosovo has been particularly difficult to assess because the 1999 conflict is still too recent and the status of Kosovo is still unresolved. This means tensions in the province are very high and the unfulfilled expectations of the Kosovo Albanian majority regarding full independence of the province are likely to continue to generate instability for some time to come.

Traditions and customary laws, especially the Kanun, continue to play an important role even today, as can be seen from the return of blood feuds to the region after 1999.<sup>97</sup> With around 14 weapons per 100 civilians, Kosovo remains one of the most highly armed areas, particularly with unregistered weapons. Gun crime continues to be high. Unlike anywhere else in the region, generation after generation has grown up in Kosovo accustomed to seeing armed men in uniforms patrolling the streets of the province's towns and villages. Ever since it was included within the borders of Serbia after the 1912-1913 Balkan wars, Kosovo's Albanian majority has been in a virtual state of war with the Serbian state and both the royal and socialist Yugoslavia maintained a high concentration of police and military in the region, particularly during the Milosevic government. The presence of foreign military has only added to Kosovo's experiences of arms. Therefore, the influence of guns on social practices and daily life plays an increasingly important role that draws on customs and cultural notions from recent history. This creates conditions that are likely to pose obstacles to disarmament campaigns.

#### **Disarmament and gun control policies**

All disarmament and SALW control interventions will continue to be plagued by a high level of organized crime, a large number of armed militias, and above all the unresolved status of Kosovo. As long as the status of the province remains uncertain it is unlikely that the population will voluntarily disarm.

## 7 Conclusion: regional overview

The motivations and reasons for gun ownership and use in SEE are complex: they are neither static nor homogenous. The reasons why some gun behaviours or practices will be rendered acceptable by a certain society at a particular time will depend on the political, historical, social and cultural context of the situation. This means to look at 'culture' or 'tradition' as isolated reasons for some gun ownership and use will not be insightful. There are some customs and traditions that do play a role in particular types of gun ownership and use in the region, but these factors interplay with many others to influence particular gun related behaviours. This report concludes that cultural practices and beliefs do play a role in justifying gun ownership and use but it is not a central role. Of course, there are pockets of culturally motivated gun related behaviours which have historical roots, such as some of the celebratory gunfire that occurs in fairly localised areas such as in Northern Albania, the mountainous areas of Croatia and the Rhodope mountain in Bulgaria. There are also new 'traditions' that have appeared, like celebrating the victory of national sports teams with gunfire. However, behaviours involving guns and people's perceptions of guns are more to do with the relative widespread availability of weapons, general weak and ineffective law enforcement and the reinvention of history and folklore for political means. In the case of former Yugoslavia, the conflicts of the 1990s play a much more important role than tradition in rendering guns acceptable.

The symbolic meaning attributed to guns will vary according to the age, gender, status, and the context of the situation. In SEE guns are associated with men and masculinity, but to different degrees. The presence of women in hunting and sports shooting activities is negligible, as is their presence in the army, police, or private security

<sup>97</sup> According to the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms, over 40 people died as result of blood feuds between 1999 and 2003, in Mangalakova, *The Kanun in Present-Day Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro*, p. 159.



companies. Wars and armed conflicts have strengthened stereotypes of men as war heroes (in the former Yugoslavia), but on the other hand it has also meant some women were forced to protect their lives using arms, and sometimes even participate in combat (e.g. female snipers in Kosovo). Gun crime is male dominated: men commit virtually all gun homicides and victims of gun crime tend to be young men. For some young men the gun is a necessary part of their identity (e.g. young offenders in Novi Sad). At the same time, a significant proportion of men in SEE do not define their manhood or masculinity in relation to guns. Guns are not used in any type of rites of passage except in isolated cases in some areas of Montenegro and Albania, where a baby boy might be 'presented' with a gun at birth by a proud father.

Print and electronic media are among the most influential means of forming people's perceptions of arms. In particular the way they portray public figures; who either use guns themselves or are somehow associated with guns. During the wars in former Yugoslavia and Moldova, government propaganda used electronic media to mobilize popular support, and national heroes were very much present on TV. Nowadays, arms are overwhelmingly present on TV, the Internet, or print media, but their effects are yet to be studied.

In general, 'traditional' and 'cultural' motivation for gun ownership and use are unlikely to be the principal barriers to SALW control interventions. Security considerations are much more likely to disrupt SALW control interventions. Many people are unwilling to give up their weapons, which they perceive as sources of security and protection, until they are satisfied that the state can take care of their security needs. Whilst there are still relatively high crime levels, the unresolved status of certain territories i.e. Kosovo, uncertain futures and interethnic distrust (Macedonia, BiH, Southern Serbia and to some extent in Montenegro and Moldova) there will be people who feel that they are justified in holding on to their guns.

## Annex A - Guns and gun ownership in South Eastern European history

### The Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman state started as one of many small Turkish states, which succeeded the Seljuk Empire in Asia Minor. Continually growing in power and size, the Ottoman Turks gradually defeated all other local Turkish dynasties and then started their expansion into Europe. The great Ottoman victories of Kosovo (1389), and Nikopol (1396) placed large parts of the Balkan Peninsula under Ottoman rule, and in 1453, Constantinople was conquered. Turkish expansion reached its peak in the 16<sup>th</sup> century under Selim I and Suleyman I the Magnificent with the Hungarian defeat in 1526. Soon afterwards, Transylvania, Walachia and Moldavia became tributary principalities. The Ottomans also conquered the Middle East and North Africa. In 1683, a huge Turkish Army besieged Vienna, but suffered a heavy defeat in the war that lasted until 1699. The decline of the Empire started, and it gradually lost territories, first to the Austro-Hungarian and the Russian Empires, and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the newly emerging Balkan nation-states.

All the religious communities in the Empire were recognized as millets – lawful religious communities, which guaranteed them the status of citizens of the Empire. However, numerous constituent ethnic and religious groups living in the Ottoman Empire did not have uniform status or rights. The Muslims in general, had a higher status and had a number of privileges, compared to the non-Muslims. The higher a person's status, the greater the likelihood that the person would be a gun owner. The particular status and rights of these subgroups depended mostly upon the orders and proclamations of the individual Sultan. The non-Muslim populations had the right to practice their religion and customs, and to speak their language, but they did not have the right to own or carry weapons. Sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror (1451-1481) first introduced these rules; his successors later expanded and revised them. Nevertheless, certain groups and categories of the Christian population who performed security related functions within the Empire were allowed to own weapons.

The Balkan Christian units regularly took part in the Ottoman campaigns in Asia Minor and the Balkans. The Ottomans learned new methods of warfare and new technologies from them, including the use of the still primitive firearm – a novelty in 14<sup>th</sup> century, European warfare. Firearms came to the Balkan Peninsula from Italy, first to Dubrovnik and later to Serbia and BiH. The Balkan Christian vassals and mercenaries were the first to introduce firearms to the Ottoman Army.<sup>98</sup>

Christians were enlisted in almost all units of the Ottoman military: the *janissary* corps, the *azabi* (cavalry), *deniz levendleri* (navy), and as fortress personnel. A significant number of Balkan Christians participated in the special and auxiliary corps, servicing the Ottoman Army. It was mostly Christians, who were allowed to possess firearms, who performed the following duties:

- The **voinuks** performed military, auxiliary and supply functions. They were established by Sultan Bayezid I (1389-1402) and were from the rural population across the Balkans, particularly in areas where the presence of Ottoman colonists was insignificant.<sup>99</sup>
- The **martoloses** were instituted as a special category in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Empire's Balkan provinces. They were Christians who guarded roads and passages. In addition, they had police functions, fighting the *haidouks* and other rebel groups.
- The **derbendci** also guarded passages and roads. In the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century almost 2,000 rural households in Roumelia (the Balkan provinces of the Empire) were designated as *derbendci*.
- The **dogandci** took care of the hunting falcons of the Sultans.
- The **dzanbazes** dug trenches, carried shells and provided supplies.

<sup>98</sup> For further details see: Matanov. С. *Средновековните Балкани. Исторически очерци.* (The Mediaeval Balkans: Historical Essays). Sofia, Paradigma, 2002, pp. 391-543.

<sup>99</sup> In times of peace the *voinuks* took care of the horses in the state stables. They were organized in units of 25 persons, and together with their families they formed a single *ocak*. Shifts of five individuals performed the duties, including as soldiers; they were called *izprateni* (sent). The other 20, together with the families, worked on the lands of the *ocak* and supported the *izprateni* and their families with food and weapons.



- The **akkyams** were service workers for the supply units of the army.

Participation in the auxiliary corps significantly changed the social status of a person not only because they gained the right to carry a gun, but because of tax and land benefits. This provided greater independence and a status closer to that of the ruling ethnic group. Some Christians were thus able to gain certain social and economic freedom without converting to Islam.

It is within these groups of the gun-owning population where one can trace some of the roots of links between guns and culture in later periods. These groups played an important role in the national liberation struggles during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and through their actions guns entered national art, symbols, rituals and folklore. These groups were the ones whose image and virtues were emphasized in the nation-building processes of Balkan nations and came to dominate the national imagination and national self-perceptions for most of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Usually settled in mountainous and remote regions, the Balkan Christians with arms-related duties were not under the constant control of the central authorities. Since they were well armed and had combat capability and readiness, it was easy for them to change their role: from keeping order and peace in a state, which they felt oppressive, to rebels fighting against the authorities and the Muslim population. Such transformations were occurring already in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when some armed groups united to support the uprisings of the Christian rural population. They reached their peak during the liberation uprisings of Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Balkan Christians who had the right to carry guns also switched sides during the war of the Holy League<sup>100</sup> against the Ottoman Empire (1683 – 1699). Armed groups of Bulgarian, Albanian, Serb, and Bosnian volunteers joined the forces of the League. Some even engaged in independent military actions. These groups also supported the numerous uprisings of this period, the more important being the Second Tarnovo uprising - 1686, the Chiprovtsi uprising of the Bulgarian Catholics - 1688, the Karposh uprising - 1689, and the Albanian uprisings - 1688-1691.

There is compelling historical evidence that the leaders and the core forces of all these combat units and uprisings were *martoloses*, *voinuks*, *derbentci* and other special categories of the local population.<sup>101</sup> In 1689, the Austrian Army liberated almost all of Northern Serbia and pushed further South into North Eastern Macedonia. The Serbian and Bulgarian populations actively supported the campaign. As a consequence a number of uprisings took place, one of the more important ones led by Karposh – a former *martolosbasi* (a *martolos* commander). Another famous *martolosbasi*, Ivo of Štip, mobilized several thousand Bulgarians to fight against the Ottoman forces. At the same time, another 3000 rebellious *arnavuts* (Albanians) came down from Montenegro and captured the small town of Peč.<sup>102</sup> In August 1689, units consisting of Serbs, Vlachs, Bulgarians and other local Christians attacked the city of Orshova, killing the Ottoman soldiers and the Muslim population. The same happened in Kyustendil (today in South Western Bulgaria), where the units of Germans, Hungarians and Bulgarians took over the fortress, killed numerous Muslims and inflicted huge material damages. In 1690, the tide turned and suffering a defeat, the Austrian Army quickly retreated before the advancing Ottoman forces. Together with Austrians, numerous Balkan Christians also left, fearing reprisals for their insurrection. The most notable was a Serbian exodus of over 30,000 families, led by Patriarch Arsenije, from Kosovo and South Serbia into the territories of the Habsburgs.<sup>103</sup>

The Ottoman authorities, as a result, decided to limit the privileges of these groups in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Ottoman archives provide evidence that 15 years after the war there were still orders and files related to their organization and the security of the local authorities. Thus, a Sultan decree issued in 1699 ordered that the

<sup>100</sup> In 1683, the Ottoman Empire launched a large attack (200,000 troops) on Vienna. A coalition called Holy League was formed to stop the invasion. It included Austria, Poland, Venice and the Russian Empire. Defeating the Ottomans in the battle of Vienna, the Holy League re-conquered Hungary and pushed South into the Balkans. The war ended with the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699.

<sup>101</sup> For details on this topic see: Zhelyazkova, A. *The Spread of Islam in the Western Balkan Lands under Ottoman Rule (15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Centuries)* Sofia, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 1990.

<sup>102</sup> Zhelyazkova, A. The Holy League's War Against the Ottoman Empire and its Impact on the Population Structure of the Balkan Provinces, in Temimi, A. ed. *Melanges prof. Machiel Kiel (Serie 2)*. Zaghouan, Fondation Temimi pour la recherche scientifique et l'information, 1999, pp. 589-600.

<sup>103</sup> Judah, T. *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 46.

old *martoloses* in Yanina, Larissa, Serfidge, Grevena, Enidge Vardar, Doiran, Strumitsa, Bitola, Prilep and Veles be replaced by 'conscientious and honest Muslims.' Another Sultan decree in March 1704, sent to the local authorities in Roumelia, ordered 'to be replaced those *martolosbasi*, who are *arnavuts* and non-Muslims [... with] appointed diligent individuals among the local Muslims.'<sup>104</sup>

During Russia's war against the Ottoman Empire in 1711, the Balkan Christians, especially Montenegrins, again united into armed groups and joined the anti-Ottoman forces. This prompted the Sultan to demand all local authorities cooperate in the confiscation of firearms, which were apparently widespread among the Christian population. 'I order you to cooperate upon receiving this high order of mine for the collection of all guns and military weapons, which the *rayah* possess, but in a way that will not bring fear and trouble among them.'<sup>105</sup>

During the period of the struggle for national liberation (18-19<sup>th</sup> century), the groups with special status were among the first to oppose the rulers and to take the leadership of the armed fight for liberation. During the period of decline and anarchy in the Ottoman Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, rural and city inhabitants were forced to protect themselves on their own from the attacks of bandit groups, stray Ottoman military units, and rebellious local landlords. Agricultural workers, artisans and other peaceful people had to create common funds for the purchase of guns and ammunitions, in order to organize the defence of their settlements or to hire armed guards with paramilitary status.

This period of prolonged insecurity undoubtedly fostered the perception that weapons were necessary for personal, family and community security. Neither the authoritarian inter-war Balkan kingdoms nor the post-WWII communist regimes succeeded in establishing the required levels of security and stability to convince all weapon-owning citizens that it made no sense to keep a gun, hidden in the closet. As will be argued below, it was quite the contrary and the communist regimes in the former Yugoslavia and especially in Albania deliberately fostered the development of a siege mentality under slogans like 'Nothing should surprise us' and 'Each citizen is a soldier.'

## Albania

Albania, included in the Ottoman Empire as the sandjak (province) of Arvanid, was difficult to administer and control because of its rugged terrain and a strong adherence of the local population to its customary laws. The presence of the Ottoman authorities was nominal and they relied on local power brokers, such as village elders. These elders participated as *spahi*<sup>106</sup> in the Ottoman Army. The villages that they ruled and their inhabitants were listed as their feudal estates. The elders protected the interests of their communities and were responsible for the recruitment of soldiers and payment of taxes to the Ottomans.

As a result Albanians had a significant presence in the Ottoman Army. The sultans' personal guards were mainly Albanians. Travellers and diplomats at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and during the 19<sup>th</sup> often described Albanians as armed on a large scale. The Christian Albanians could hardly be distinguished from the Muslim Albanians, in terms of armament and military service. In the big Ottoman fortresses in Southern Albania (Skrapari) or in Northern Albania (Rozafat and Drisht), a significant part of the garrison's personnel were local Albanians.

Albanians also had a tradition of producing weapons. Important Albanian pashas like Ali pashë Tepelena (1740-1822) and the Bushatlli family (17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century) had weapon production plants. Between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the weapons produced in Albania were rifles, pistols, jatagans, daggers and knives, etc. Often the weapons had artistic ornaments. The long Albanian rifle was famous and known in the Ottoman Empire as 'Arnautka.'<sup>107</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Stojanovski, A. *Дервенджиството во Македонија (Derbendci in Macedonia)*. Skopje, Institut za nacionalna istorija, 1974, p. 113 & pp. 124-126.

<sup>105</sup> Zhelyazkova, A. *Seventeenth Century Uprisings and their Effects on the Demographic Structure of the Ottoman Empire's Balkan Provinces in 300 години Чипровско въстание. Принос към историята на българите през XVII век (300 Years of the Chiprovo Uprising. Contribution to the History of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Bulgarians)*. Sofia, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 1988, pp. 13-25.

<sup>106</sup> Spahis were people who participated as officers in the Ottoman Army in exchange for receiving property and land. When reporting for duty, spahis had to bring a certain number of soldiers with them.

<sup>107</sup> *Fjalori enciklopedik shqiptar* (The Albanian Encyclopedic Dictionary). Tirana, Academy of Sciences of PSR of Albania, 1985, p. 43.



The Albanian population were generally well armed towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Skendi wrote that in Northern Albania, a man's rifle was his 'best friend'.<sup>108</sup> In his memoirs, Eqerem Bej Vlora, an Albanian aristocrat who was an important actor in the Albanian push towards independence, claims that by 1910, there were around a quarter of a million rifles for the two million Albanians living in the Ottoman Empire (although it is not clear what his grounds were for this claim).<sup>109</sup> The Young Turks<sup>110</sup> (1908-1918) tried to centralize the Ottoman Empire and thus to deprive Albanians of their traditional autonomy. They could not however provide enough government protection to ensure personal or community security. Thus, the population was reluctant to surrender its weapons. In addition, weapons and ammunition were expensive and valuable possessions for the average poor Albanian.

After the uprisings in 1908-1910 in Northern Albania and Kosovo, the Ottoman troops tried to forcibly disarm the population over the course of several months. The final account was that the weapons collected included around 23,000 rifles in the Prishtina area, 15,000 rifles in Mitrovica, and 8000 rifles in Western Kosovo.<sup>111</sup>

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

In the Ottoman times, many Bosnians abandoned Christianity and adopted Islam and some of them joined the Ottoman ruling elite as soldiers, officials, Islamic jurists and scholars, or high level administrators. BiH was organized as a border province because of its geographic specificity and strategic location. A high number of garrisons and military units were located there and there were frequent border clashes, especially in Northern and North Eastern BiH. It made life in BiH very different to the internal parts of Roumelia. Situated on the military border of the Empire with the Western Catholic world, the Bosnian Muslims often participated in the wars against the Austro-Hungarian Empire between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Christians were not required to join the army, but they paid a special head-tax called *jizya*.

## Croatia

Croatia was a border region of the Habsburg and later Austrian-Hungarian Empires. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the Ottoman defeat in the 1683-1699 war, the regions of Slavonia and Lika were part of the Ottoman Empire. In 1630, in a document entitled *Statuta Valachorum*, King Ferdinand of Habsburg, carved out the areas of Croatia and Slavonia neighbouring the Ottoman Empire into a Military Frontier (*Vojna Krajina*). This region was ruled directly from Vienna's military headquarters. The majority of the population of the Military Frontier were Serbs and Vlachs. Serbs settled in the region after their 1690 exodus from Kosovo and Southern Serbia, following the Ottoman victory against the Habsburg armies. In exchange for its military services, the frontier population was free from feudal tax obligations and could elect its own leaders, practice Orthodox Christianity, and carry weapons.<sup>112</sup> Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of peasants had their own private small land holdings and most possessed firearms. Gradually Serbs became the majority population of the Military Frontier, as most Vlachs abandoned their language and culture and assimilated into the Serbian ethnos. Serbs from the Military Frontier never quite abandoned their traditional soldier life-style, unlike Serbs in Southern Serbia, Belgrade or Vojvodina. The region, which became known as Krajina, remained a clearly distinct cultural space both in royal and socialist Yugoslavia.

## Moldova

Moldova had a different status than other Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire. It was a tributary to the Empire and its inhabitants had a different set of rights than Christians in other provinces.<sup>113</sup> Until the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, various inhabitants of Moldova preserved the right to own arms (including firearms). These

<sup>108</sup> Skendi, S. *The Albanian National Awakening 1878-1912*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1967, p. 54.

<sup>109</sup> Eqerem bej Vlora, *Kujtime* (Memories). Tirana, Shtepia e Librit dhe e Komunikimit, 2003, p. 232.

<sup>110</sup> The Young Turks were a Turkish patriotic-nationalistic society, officially known as the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). The Young Turks led a rebellion against Sultan Abdul Hamid II (who was officially deposed and exiled in 1909). They ruled the Ottoman Empire from 1908 until the end of WWI in November 1918.

<sup>111</sup> Vlora, *Kujtime*. p. 243. Please note that Malcolm argues instead that the Young Turks collected 147,525 weapons in their disarmament program. Vlora's estimate looks more realistic. Malcolm, N. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London, Macmillan, 1998.

<sup>112</sup> Malcolm, N. *Bosnia. A Short History*. New York, New York University Press, 1994, pp. 72-73.

<sup>113</sup> Cherepnin, L. V. ed. *История Молдавской ССР: Том I* (History of the Moldavian SSR: Vol. I), Kishinev, 1965, p. 161.

included the nobles (*boierii*) and courtiers (*curteni*), who were divided into militarized sub-categories that included servants (infantry and cavalry), equestrians (*calarashi*) and infantry and equestrians (*viteji*). The low-ranking nobility and the most skilful combatants from other categories constituted the core of the stationary armies around high-ranking nobility and the King (*Domnitor*) of Moldova. Border guardsmen, citadel guardsmen and even ordinary men, capable of serving in the army, were allowed to keep arms. During the rule of Stefan the Great (in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century) there were regular reviews of the army. Under the threat of decapitation every man had to present himself armed and equipped for battle. At the time firearms were imported from Poland while some manufacturing was established in *Brasov* (present day Romania) and on a smaller scale in some Moldovan and Transylvanian cities.<sup>114</sup>

After the annexation of Bessarabia to Russia in 1812, the right of arms possession was given to the representatives of the provincial administrations, as well as local militia units and regular Russian troops, stationed in this area. Until the 1870s, ordinary inhabitants were not recruited to the Russian Emperor's Army. Like in other Russian provinces, the nobles, and some other privileged social groups in the Empire, owned different guns and pistols for self-defence, pride, duels, hunting, sport and other occasions.

## Montenegro

Montenegro fell under Ottoman domination in 1496; after 1513, it was organized as a separate administrative unit within the Empire (*Crnogorski sandzaktat*). It had a considerable degree of governmental, judicial and military autonomy. This position lasted until 1669, after which the territory around Mt. Lovcen gained full independence.<sup>115</sup> The roles of the state rulers were assumed by the prince-bishops (*vladikas*), the pan-Montenegrin Convention (*Opsti crnogorski zbor*), and the Council of Clan Chiefs (*Zbor glavara*). The lower levels of governance were in the hands of clan assemblies.

With the consolidation of power of Vladika Petar I Petrovic (1784-1830) Montenegro headed towards full independence and introduced legislation aiming to abolish the society's clan-based structure. The tribal traditions, although quite dynamic, remained even during the time of Yugoslavia.<sup>116</sup>

In 1908, the National Geographic Magazine described 'the proud and independent character' of Montenegrins, who 'hold [their] honour above all earthly price, while the ambition of every boy is to be a warrior and rival the deeds of the heroes of old.' The typical male outfit included 'belt stuck full of weapons, knives, pistols, etc.,' for Montenegrins considered their 'toilette incomplete without such accessories, and indeed one's eyes becomes so accustomed to seeing every man a walking arsenal that on returning to work-a-day Europe people look strangely undressed.'<sup>117</sup> A usual accessory was also a long Turkish rifle or the 'Arnautka' rifle, hung over the shoulder.<sup>118</sup>

Montenegrin society continued to be described as consisting of tribes, which were divided into family clans well into the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Relations between and within clans were traditionally regulated by several customary laws.<sup>119</sup> Among the most important were *Grbaljski Zakonik*<sup>120</sup> and *Vasojevicki Zakon*.<sup>121</sup> According to *Grbaljski Zakonik*, the carrying of weapons was obligatory. The law stated that 'every Grbljanin has to carry his weapons when leaving home, otherwise his weapon will be taken away and sold.'<sup>122</sup> The *Vasojevicki Zakon* was written down in 1829. One of its articles specified the military obligations of its subjects: 'Those who do not

<sup>114</sup> *Studii si materiale de muzeografie si istorie militara*, Bucharest, Musee Central Militaire, 1971-1972, pp. 77-78.

<sup>115</sup> Popovic, M. *Mali narod i nacionalizam* (Small Nations and Nationalism). Cetinje, Crnogorski kulturni krug, 1997.

<sup>116</sup> Popovic, M. *Черногорският въпрос* (The Montenegrin Question), Sofia, Sofia Press, 2001, pp. 47-48.

<sup>117</sup> Coffin, M.C. Where East Meets West: A Visit to Picturesque Dalmatia, Montenegro and Herzegovina, in *National Geographic Magazine*, May 1908. At: <<http://www.njegos.org/ng/ng2.htm>>.

<sup>118</sup> *Montenegrin folk costume*. See: <[http://www.heritage.cg.yu/muzealije/nosnja\\_e.htm](http://www.heritage.cg.yu/muzealije/nosnja_e.htm)>.

<sup>119</sup> Corovic, V. *Istorija srpskog naroda* (History of the Serbian Nation). Belgrade, Ars Libri, 1997. At: <[http://www.rastko.org.yu/rastko-bl/istorija/corovic/istorija/index\\_1.html](http://www.rastko.org.yu/rastko-bl/istorija/corovic/istorija/index_1.html)>.

<sup>120</sup> Grbalj is an area in Boka Kotorska Bay among three towns: Kotor, Budva and Tivat.

<sup>121</sup> The Vasojevic family was the largest tribe in Montenegro, populating the area along the river Lim in the Eastern part of Montenegro.

<sup>122</sup> 'Svaki Grbljanin kad iz kuće krene i makar gdje pođe bez oružja iz doma, da mu se oružje proda i knežina popije,' quoted in Kornelije Tacit, *Germanija*. Belgrade, Drzavna stamparija Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, 1927. At: <[http://www.rastko.org.yu/civ2/rim/tacit-germanija\\_1.htm](http://www.rastko.org.yu/civ2/rim/tacit-germanija_1.htm)>.



come to aid when the enemies attack our border-guards will be excluded from division of the spoils, and nobody will marry a girl from his family nor will give him a bride.<sup>123</sup> Customary laws also regulated blood vendettas. If one member of the clan was offended, hurt or killed, all clan members were affected and obliged to avenge the offence or death, in kind. Blood vendettas were prevalent in Montenegro until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The basic cultural and historical difference in comparison with the Albanian Kanun is that as early as the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Montenegrin state became well established and tried to suppress tribal structures, undertaking drastic action to eradicate blood vengeance. Tribal leaders and high-ranking priests realized that the hostilities among the tribes and the numerous casualties were weakening the state and making it vulnerable to the Ottomans. In 1803, the National Assembly (Skupština) adopted the first Montenegrin law, which envisaged capital punishment for blood vendettas, thus starting a process that has led to the present non-existence of customary laws.

### **Nation Building and 'Gun Culture'**

The struggle for independent statehood and the formation of nation-states in SEE were violent processes, where weapons took on a special importance and symbolic meanings. These processes are of particular importance for the perception of guns as part of 'tradition,' as the invention of traditions is closely associated with nation building. Nation building is a recurrent activity, which involves endless reinterpretations, rediscoveries and reconstructions. The values, myths, symbols and even the holy places each new generation chooses to praise as the essence of its nation, have to be rooted somewhere in the nation's past. Yet, present needs and future goals in turn influence the way 'the past' is re-constructed and that is why myths occupy their central role in nation building.<sup>124</sup>

Myths are one of the most important pillars on which the system of morality and values of societies, and especially of nations, rests. In other words, myths are a set of beliefs a society has about itself. As such, they attempt to monopolize the right to prescribe the content and the limits of an individual set of beliefs that members of society can have. Such a monopoly is necessary for the existence of a cohesive community. Myths and mythic histories bring the collective heritage back to life and are therefore essential in identifying 'who we are.'<sup>125</sup> Myths, or mythic versions of history, offer a symbolic framework through which people can be mobilised to act as a community. Myths provide the glue with which a mass is turned into a nation, whose members possess a sense of belonging and identity, unity and integration, uniqueness and autonomy.

The Balkan nations' historic, nation-building myths are based on (real and legendary) heroic deeds from the past, glorious ancient kingdoms, and military valour. Directly or indirectly, weapons play an important role in all of them. These myths remain vital and influential into the present day, especially among the nations of former Yugoslavia and in Moldova, where processes of nation-state formation were put into motion again in the 1990s.

Many historic myths praise the glorious past, which was in most cases linked to an armed struggle against a foreign oppressor. The myths of 'military valour' are especially important since they homogenize the nation, diminishing the role of individuals and praising collective (heroic) deeds. For example, the most important Serbian myth is the myth of the Kosovo battle. It explains a military 'defeat'<sup>126</sup> as a conscious choice of heavenly glory over earthly power. In Serbia, the battle is considered the most decisive moment in Serbian history, because it marks the destruction of the glorious Serbian medieval empire and the beginning of subjugation by the Ottoman

<sup>123</sup> Ko ne priteče u pomoć kad dušmani udare na graničare, da nema nikakva dijela u plijenu i da se od njega niko ne ženi niti mu đevojku daje. *Vasojevic Law in 12 Articles*. (Vasojevički Zakon u 12 točaka). At: <<http://rastko.org.yu/rastko-cg/povijest/vaszak.html>>.

<sup>124</sup> Smith, A. D. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, 1996, pp. 206-208.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>126</sup> According to limited historic sources, the battle ended without a clear outcome, with leaders of both camps, Serbian Prince Lazar and Ottoman Sultan Murad I, dead and both armies retreating after suffering heavy losses. Anzulovic, B. *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide*. London, Hurst & Company, 1999, pp. 38-39.



Turks. The mythical account of the battle is not based on historic documents and largely contradicts most of the known facts.<sup>127</sup>

The mythic version of the event, has been popular and widely accepted in Serbia since the 19<sup>th</sup> century national revival, when it played a central role and was immortalized in an epic song, 'The Fall of the Serbian Empire.' The song explains that on the eve of the battle, Saint Elias visited Prince Lazar and asked him to make a choice; if he wanted to rule on Earth, he would win the battle, but if he wanted to have a Kingdom in Heaven, he and his army would be annihilated. Lazar chose the latter, and the myth transformed an (alleged) military defeat into a moral victory.<sup>128</sup>

The myth of military valour is exceptionally strong among Serbs and was fed by their uprisings against the Ottomans, and by their victories in two Balkan wars and in two World Wars. The importance of the myth was not lost on Slobodan Milosevic. On 16 March 1991, the day when Milan Babic, leader of the Serb rebels in Croatia, proclaimed the independence of Krajina from Croatia, Milosevic stated in the Serbian Parliament that he hoped *'that they [the Croats] won't be so crazy to fight with us, because if we don't know how to work, at least we know how to fight.'*<sup>129</sup>

Self-perception of exceptional military valour is very strong also in Montenegro and in Albania.<sup>130</sup> Thus, Montenegrins often explain the late conquest of the Ottomans, not by the region's remoteness and terrain that is difficult to conquer, but by their bravery and military skills.

The perception of the Balkan man as a warrior reached its climax during the dissolution of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires and national liberation movements in the Balkans. The 19<sup>th</sup> century (1912 for Albania) liberation movements were accompanied by the creation of armies and construction of army barracks. The gathering of significant groups of men in barracks was emblematic of the coming of the European 'Modern Age.' The barracks marked a specific territory. Most of the conscripts came from rural areas. For them joining the army meant a new life. Guns were a sacred way of experiencing new times and new technological achievements, and these people felt proud that they were going to serve their newly revived independent fatherlands. The myths related to military service and a man's ability to handle and understand firearms, were so widely spread that even after WWII, in many rural areas across the Balkans it was considered inappropriate for a woman to marry a man who had not served in the army.<sup>131</sup>

## **The Interwar Period and WWII**

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, numerous violent conflicts occurred in the Balkans. During these periods, when national armies were already formed, millions of men from the region learned how to use firearms and many firearms have remained in their households.

## **Albania**

Even though Albania declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912, its consolidation as a nation-state lasted decades. Hence, in times of insecurity, Albanians held on to their weapons. Albanian nation building and state formation was initially interrupted by WWI. Between 1911 and 1920 Northern Albanian insurgents replenished their arsenals and formed armed groups called *kaçaks* (the 'outlaws'), that fought first against

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<sup>127</sup> The Serbian medieval empire in reality started to disintegrate immediately after the death of its greatest ruler, Dusan Silni, in 1355. The army, which faced the Ottomans in the Kosovo battle was not exclusively Serbian, but a coalition of Christian armies, which included the units of the Bosnian King Tvrtko, and most likely some Albanian and Wallachian units. Not all Serbian despots, who divided Dusan's Empire after his death, joined the battle. Lazar Hrebljanovic, now remembered as *the* Serbian leader at the time, was in fact only one of many. The battle also did not mark the end of Serbia, since the kingdom (or remnants of it) continued to exist for another seventy years after the battle. In Judah, T. *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997, pp. 31-34.

<sup>128</sup> Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia*. pp. 11-13.

<sup>129</sup> Quoted in Silber, L & Little, A. *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*. New York, Penguin Books, 1997, p. 129.

<sup>130</sup> Udovicki, J. The Bonds and the Fault Lines in Udovicki, J. & Ridgeway, J. eds. *Burn This House: The Making and Unmaking of Yugoslavia*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2000, p. 12.

<sup>131</sup> Information from IMIR's fieldwork, shared by a large number of respondents from various SEE countries.



the Young Turks and then the Serb forces. There were an estimated 5,000 *kaçaks* in Kosovo in 1911.<sup>132</sup> As the repression from the Serb forces in Kosovo grew so did the resistance against Serbs and their Albanian collaborators.<sup>133</sup> By 1918, the Kosovo *kaçaks* included 2,000 core fighters and around 100,000 supporters.<sup>134</sup> In the newly independent Albania, between 1912 and 1923, because of the unstable and dangerous situation, the population held on to their weapons.<sup>135</sup>

During his fourteen years of rule, the Albanian King Ahmed Zogu (1925-1939) tried to consolidate the Albanian state. Zogu implemented some successful disarmament measures. Firstly, he ensured the loyalty of the Northern Albanian clan chiefs by appointing them as salaried government officials, although they simply carried out their usual tribal supervisory responsibilities.<sup>136</sup> Zogu successfully created a police gendarmerie, trained and supervised by British inspectors. In seven years, this new police force eliminated the widespread brigandage. Zogu also outlawed blood feuds. Men were banned from walking with guns, and they faced imprisonment for breaking the new penal law.<sup>137</sup> The state severely punished anyone who violated the rules of the new public order. Zogu's reign ended when Italy invaded Albania in 1939, and for the next five years, Albania was occupied by fascist Italy and then Nazi Germany. During the 1941-1945 period there was a new influx of arms, supplied by Britain, who supported the resistance fighters, who were already in their thousands.<sup>138</sup>

## Bulgaria

Bulgaria was probably the one country, where the wars resulted in a significant reduction in the small arms arsenal. Bulgaria was defeated in both the Second Balkan War (1913) and WWI (1918). In the three wars<sup>139</sup> fought in six years, the country suffered 156,000 dead and another 275,000 wounded. 150,000 civilians died from various diseases like typhus, cholera and influenza (a total of about 8% of the population). According to the provisions of the Neuilly Treaty, Bulgaria was obliged to abolish obligatory conscription into the army and to decrease its standing army to 20,000 soldiers. Bulgaria also had to turn over more than 350,000 rifles, 1,600 machine guns and other weapons. However, numerous weapons were hidden and later returned to the army.

## The Kingdom of Yugoslavia

The Army of the newly established Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes<sup>140</sup> kept strict control over its own firearms arsenal after WWI, so that no firearms could pass from military to civilian possession after demobilization. However, there were two significant sources for civilians to acquire firearms: abandoned weapons and weapons purposefully distributed to the population. Numerous weapons were left on the battlefields by the retreating Austro-Hungarian Army at the end of WWI. Their quantities were so significant that they armed not only of the local population but also the Army of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Although the exact amounts and types of equipment that were collected cannot be quantified, there are indicators that the quantities were significant. For instance, the 1921 records of the Ministry of Traffic show that 1,500 train cars, 1,600 soldiers, 1,400 cattle, 1,000 vehicles and 40 trucks were involved in the collection of abandoned military equipment.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Malcolm, *Kosovo*. p. 242.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 273, 278.

<sup>134</sup> Vickers, M. *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo*. London, Hurst, 1998, p. 100.

<sup>135</sup> Vlorë, *Kujtime*. p. 482.

<sup>136</sup> Jacques, E. E. *The Albanians: An Ethnic History from Prehistoric Times to the Present*. Jefferson NC, McFarland & Company Inc., 1995, p. 383.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>138</sup> Vickers, M. *The Albanians: A Modern History*. London, IB Tauris, 1999.

<sup>139</sup> Including the 1912 First Balkan War.

<sup>140</sup> The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was proclaimed on 01 December, 1918. The new Kingdom was made up of the formerly independent kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro, which joined with substantial territory that was formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and was populated predominantly by Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. In 1929, the country was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

<sup>141</sup> Mile Bjelajac, *Vojska Kraljevine SHS 1918-1921* [Army of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, 1918-1921], Belgrade, Narodna Knjižica, 1988, p. 110.

The other source of gun proliferation was the handing out of weapons to the civilian population by governments. This primarily concerned South Serbia and Kosovo, and took place on several occasions: right after WWI in 1919; during the tensions between Bulgaria and Serbia 1927-1932, when firearms were distributed among the population on both sides of the border; and again in the 1937-38 period when Italy distributed firearms through Albania into the territory of Kosovo and South Serbia.<sup>142</sup>

In the years following WWI, despite the attempts of the Serbian government to collect the firearms from the Albanian paramilitary troops, not all weapons were successfully collected on the territory of the 3<sup>rd</sup> military region (South Serbia/Kosovo), and new weapons were being brought in from Albania all the time. This made the security situation very unstable. At the end of November 1920, this led to the authorities bringing back arms that were previously confiscated from the Serbian and Montenegrin populations, so they could protect themselves and their property, because police and military units could offer them no protection. In August 1921, the Ministry for Internal Affairs was forced to take these arms back from the Montenegrin population in the Southern areas, since they started to use them in criminal activities.<sup>143</sup>

The historic province of Macedonia remained under Ottoman rule until the first Balkan War in 1912, after which it was divided among Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria. The region remained engulfed in wars for the entire period between 1912 and 1918, which is the most significant factor for firearm proliferation among the population. Many Macedonians joined or were recruited by the invading armies or the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO). Although in principle the demobilized soldiers were not allowed to keep their guns, the chaos of these years has affected gun ownership in Macedonia.<sup>144</sup> In the interwar period the Serbian population in Macedonia was given firearms by the Serbian authorities in order to protect themselves from attacks by hostile neighbours or the IMRO revolutionaries.

The situation was quite similar in BiH. The Great Powers forced the Ottomans to cede administration of BiH to Austria-Hungary at the Berlin Congress of 1878. Vienna administered BiH until 1908, when it officially annexed the region. Despite introducing new political practices and trying to modernize BiH, Austria-Hungary never managed to win over the local population. Bosnian Muslims resented the fact that they had lost their privileged position and become subjected to a Christian state, and Serbs from BiH wanted to join Serbia. As a border region, BiH has always been heavily armed, and many residents of the province decided to keep their arms and even formed armed resistance groups against the Austrian rule. Gavrilo Princip, a member of one such group, 'Mlada Bosna' organization, assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, in Sarajevo, starting the chain of events that triggered WWI. The incorporation of BiH into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes did not improve the security situation in BiH. Social and economic unrest over property redistribution and the resentment Croats and Bosnian Muslims felt over the Serbian domination of the new state, led many people to hold on to their weapons.

No studies on gun possession in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were conducted in Croatia.<sup>145</sup> Croatia did not take part in the two Balkan Wars in 1912-1913, so in that sense, its population had less exposure to small arms proliferation than the other Balkan countries during that period. In WWI the Croatian population fought on the Austro-Hungarian side, and like in Serbia, the Austro-Hungarian Army left behind certain quantities of arms.

Much about gun proliferation and 'gun culture' in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia can be learned from the following episode: on 20 June 1928, whilst the parliament was in session, a member of the government majority, the Montenegrin deputy Punisa Racic shot down and killed five members of the Croatian Peasant Party, including their leader Stjepan Radic. In response to the event, the King banned all political parties and proclaimed dictatorship. Guns in a sense were being used as a means to solve a dispute and maintain power and authority.

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<sup>142</sup> Interview by Toni Petkovic with Prof. Mile Bjelajac, held in Novi Sad on 23 November 2005.

<sup>143</sup> Bjelajac, *Vojaska Kraljevine SHS 1918-1921*, p. 231.

<sup>144</sup> Interview by Zhidas Daskalovski with the Director of the Institute for National History, Dr. Todor Chepreganov, held in Skopje on 14 November 2005.

<sup>145</sup> Interview with Tomislav Anić, Croatian Institute for History, November 2005.



## Moldova

During WWI, most of the gun owners in Moldova were members of the Tsar's Army. The officers usually had revolvers 'Nagan,' the soldiers had *Mosin* rifles, the gendarmerie and the police had revolvers and swords. Following the Democratic Revolution in Russia in February 1917,<sup>146</sup> the Russian Army was in disarray and many soldiers deserted their contingents, often abandoning their guns or taking them home. During these 'revolutionary' times Moldova (*Bessarabia*) was in an anarchic state with much crime, and households had to provide for their own security.<sup>147</sup> Guns were the most effective mechanism for psychologically and in practice, protecting their homes and their families.

## Gun ownership during the communist era

The communist period probably has had the most significant impact on patterns of gun use in SEE. After almost a century of national liberation struggles and numerous wars, by the end of WWII most people had become accustomed to viewing guns as a part of their lives. The communist regimes across the region, however, were committed to bringing firearms owned by the civilian population under control. They made every effort, using the repressive state apparatus, to disarm the civilian population and strictly limit the use of firearms. In all countries in the region, hunting arms remained the prevailing form of private gun ownership. Communist regimes, however, continued to expose citizens to arms through several other activities, tightly controlled by the government. These included:

- a) Sports;
- b) Compulsory military service for men;
- c) Military training in high-schools.

It is difficult to judge to what extent these interactions with arms have influenced people's attitudes towards gun ownership or have precipitated gun-ownership in post-communist times. As is often the case with compulsory activities people have to be involved in against their will, it is more likely that compulsory military service and military training in schools actually produced a far greater number of 'gun haters' than 'gun lovers,' at least among the educated and urban population.

## Albania

After WWII, the communist state ruthlessly pursued its goal of asserting tight control over every aspect of life, and confirming itself as having a monopoly on violence. To achieve this, the communist government focused its efforts on the eradication of traditional customs of 'tribal' highlanders, so that they would be loyal only to the communist state. Immediately after the end of the war, the communist government initiated the voluntary collection of civilians' weapons. In 1945, the government introduced tougher laws about weapons collection, threatening severe punishment to anyone who did not hand in their weapons. In order to enforce the laws, the state established Special Forces to find and collect weapons. The Special Forces would search people's houses, and if they found weapons the owner would be put on trial and convicted. Reportedly, the communist government managed to collect more than 98% of the weapons among the population.<sup>148</sup>

As part of its defence policy during the communist era, Albania developed a small arms industry, while strictly controlling the use of weapons by private individuals. The old patriarchal image of a man defending his own home with his rifle was substituted with the new communist image of everyone (men and women) defending the country together with a rifle in hand. The communist government consolidated the dictatorship of the proletariat that controlled nearly all aspects of Albanian life. The weapon was glorified again but now as a tool of the communist

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<sup>146</sup> The Democratic or February Revolution overthrew the Russian Monarch, Emperor Nicholas II. A coalition of conservative, liberal, and moderate socialist politicians formed the Provisional Government on 27 February 1917. The Provisional Government was in turn overthrown by the Bolshevik Revolution on October 24 and 25, 1917. In *Russian Revolutions of 1917*, at: <[http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia\\_761569348/Russian\\_Revolutions\\_of\\_1917.html](http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761569348/Russian_Revolutions_of_1917.html)>.

<sup>147</sup> Ciobanu, V. *Militarii Basarabeni in Miscarea nationala din 1917-1918*, Chisinau, 2003, p. 34.

<sup>148</sup> Beka, R. *Historiku i Armeve* (History of Weapons in Albania). Presentation prepared for Peace Education Trainings (unpublished), Tirana, 2004, p. 7.

revolution. Every Albanian male had to serve in the new Albanian Army. The state therefore regulated the use of weapons, and changed people's attitudes towards guns. It also forced the secularization of Albanians through the oppression of religion.<sup>149</sup> Weapons yet again were playing a key role in the maintenance of a hegemonic regime.

## **Bulgaria**

During the communist period, civilian possession of firearms was limited to hunters and sportsmen under a highly restrictive regime. During that time, many weapon owners were actually privileged party members (especially those honoured as 'Active Fighters against Fascism and Capitalism'), or senior Ministers of Defence (MoD), or Ministry of Internal Affairs (Mol) officials. The most common weapons among civilians at that time were hunting rifles and almost all of those were legal. Illegal firearms were generally rifles, pistols, revolvers, and assault rifles left over from WWI and WWII. A small number of award weapons, mostly handguns, were distributed to security officers and Communist Party officials. So at the end of this period, there were only around 120,000 weapons, almost all of which hunting rifles.<sup>150</sup>

## **Moldova**

In the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s the Soviet regime deported thousands of families and individuals from Moldova to Siberia, to punish them for siding with the Great Romanian Kingdom (1918 - 1940; 1941 - 1944), and participating in anti-Soviet and anti-communist guerrilla groups. Thus, in Moldova no one could own a gun, except members of the Soviet Army (under very strict rules and codes of use), the police, the KGB officers, guards at the Ministry for Internal Affairs, and a limited number of hunters. Veterans could not keep their award weapons: they had to officially present them to the police or to the museums. Exceptions were made for retired generals on special permission.

## **Yugoslavia**

Under the communist government only the former communist guerrilla fighters, their relatives, and WWII veterans were allowed to keep non-hunting or sports firearms, most often as war trophies.<sup>151</sup> The former communist guerrillas and their relatives were able to obtain guns, while other citizens were not allowed to legally own a gun. Pre-war family firearms that managed to avoid being handed in to the authorities were hidden and not used.

However, the public perception of the former Yugoslavia was of a country that was militarily important. Former Yugoslav authorities often boasted that the People's Yugoslav Army was a European military powerhouse. Obligatory military service for young men meant that the male half of the Yugoslav population was fully trained in handling and firing military firearms and was accustomed to using a range of weapons. In addition to the federal army, Yugoslavia also had a concept of civil defence. Each republic had its own 'territorial defence' reserve units, which involved all male citizens of the republic, who had to report periodically for military exercises. People's defence and civil self-protection, became part of the school curriculum and all pupils were instructed in basic firearms use and maintenance, including practical instruction with real rifles and automatic weapons.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Zickel, E. R. & Iwaskiw, W. R. eds. *Albania: A Country Study*. Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1992, pp. 85-86. At: <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/altoc.html>>

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Gen.(Ret.) Chavdar Chervenkov, former Minister of Interior (1994), 21 July 1994.

<sup>151</sup> Interview with a history professor at the University of Cyril and Methodius, in Skopje, Vlado Popovski, on 14 November 2005.

<sup>152</sup> Matveeva et al, *Macedonia: Guns, Policing and Ethnic Division*, p. 40.



COUNTRY	NUMBER OF LEGAL SMALL ARMS	NUMBER OF LEGAL SMALL ARMS PER 100 INHABITANTS
BiH	342,131	8.3
Bulgaria	~ 120,000	1.3
Croatia	299,586	6.5
Kosovo	65,540	4.1
Macedonia	99,324	5.2
Montenegro	78,928	13.5
Slovenia	79,680	4.2
Serbia	492,314	8.6
Vojvodina region	143,651	7.1

**Table 11: Small Arms Possession at the end of 1989<sup>153</sup>**

<sup>153</sup> Gorjanc, M. Small Arms and Light Weapons and National Security: A Problem of the Present and the Near Future. Paper presented at the *Workshop on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Possible Contribution to the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe*, Ljubljana, 27 January 2003. Quoted in Florquin & O'Neill Stoneman, 'A house isn't a home without a gun' - SALW Survey of Republic of Montenegro, p. 3.; Bulgarian data - Ministry of Interior data provided to CSD.

## Annex B - Legal regulations for guns in SEE

### Albania

The 1992 Weapons Law, No. 7566, regulates private gun possession. It allows state officials, hunters, businesspeople with over US\$ 500,000 of capital, and people living in border areas, to possess weapons legally.<sup>154</sup> There was an amnesty to allow civilians to surrender their weapons without prosecution, provided they had not used the gun in an offence. The amnesty was until 31 May 2005, but it is likely the state will extend it for a further two years.<sup>155</sup> The law prohibits the 'firing of hunting and combat firearms during holidays, manifestations, engagements, weddings and deaths, and on other occasions.'<sup>156</sup>

### Bosnia-Herzegovina

The Acquisition, Possession and Carriage of Weapons and Ammunition Law,<sup>157</sup> and the Arms and Ammunition Law, in Republika Srpska, regulate civilian weapon possession.<sup>158</sup> An updated version was submitted to the Office of the High Representative (OHR) in April 2003. There has been an attempt to pass a uniform law on civilian weapon possession in the FBiH, but the draft law lacked sufficient political support, according to Enes Zukanovic, an FBiH Member of Parliament.<sup>159</sup> In Republika Srpska, the law is vague about restrictions on public use of firearms. It says, 'The use of weapons is forbidden in public places, and in other places where the use of weapons may jeopardize the safety of people, the premises, and disturb public order and peace.'

### Bulgaria

The Control of Explosive Substances, Firearms and Ammunition Law (LCESFA), regulates the production, acquisition, possession, use and domestic trade of weapons. It was last amended in September 2003. The LCESFA also outlines procedures for the acquisition, storage, carriage and use of firearms. The LCESFA states that permits for the production, trade and transportation of explosives, firearms and munitions will not be issued to someone who has a criminal record, who is mentally ill, or is receiving treatment for alcohol or drug addiction (Article 12). Separate permits are required for the possession and carriage of weapons. The only guns civilians may use for self-defence are handguns (although if proved necessary citizens can own two handguns for self-defence, provided the barrel is less than 300mm). They permit rifles (smooth bore or rifled bore) for hunting, and handguns and rifles for sports shooting. They also permit automatic weapons to protect high-risk sites, provided the Ministry for Internal Affairs approves it.<sup>160</sup> Weapons permitted for 'cultural use' (i.e. film production) include handguns, hunting rifles as well as automatic firearms. Celebratory gunfire is illegal, and the concealment of firearms which are being carried is mandatory.

### Croatia

The Weapons Law regulates the licensing and possession of SALW. Citizens are allowed to possess firearms, and in some circumstances carry firearms for self-protection, hunting or sports shooting. There is a dual licence procedure to permit the possession and carriage of firearms by civilians. However, an individual may own any number of arms. People who have weapons for self-defence must keep them at home, unless they can justify why carrying them is necessary and they then acquire a special permit. The penalty for the illegal possession

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<sup>154</sup> Council of Ministers Decision No. 53, 'For the definition of border areas, types of weapons, number of ammunition, the criteria for granting licenses for legal weapons and the respective tariffs,' 04 February 1999; Council of Ministers Decision No. 56, 'For the granting of licenses for legal weapons for the heads and partners of commercial companies,' 04 February 1999.

<sup>155</sup> Holtom et al. *Turning the page: Small arms and light weapons in Albania*, p. 108

<sup>156</sup> Article 24a of the Decision on Regulations of Management and Control of Firearms for Physical and Legal Persons.

<sup>157</sup> *Official Gazette of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina*. 21/92, 13/93, 13/94.

<sup>158</sup> *Official Gazette of the Republika Srpska*. 13/93, 16/95, 6/96, 8/96, Correction, 9/96, 19/98.

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Enes Zukanovic, quoted in *Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey, Bosnia and Herzegovina*. BICC, 2004, p. 19.

<sup>160</sup> *South Eastern Europe SALW Monitor 2005*, pp. 57-58; Rynn et al. *Taming the Arsenal – Small Arms and Light Weapons in Bulgaria*, p. 73.



of firearms includes a fine of up to € 6,500, and a 3-month to 6-year prison sentence<sup>161</sup> The law forbids that guns for hunting and shooting sports are taken outside hunting grounds and shooting ranges. It is mandatory for weapons to be concealed when in carriage. The regulations in effect preclude the use of weapons in any rituals or celebrations.

### **Kosovo**

Authorization of Possession of Weapons in Kosovo, UNMIK Regulation No. 2001/7, regulates weapons possession in Kosovo. It authorizes the possession and carrying of weapons for self-defence purposes by individuals holding a Weapons Authorization Card. Those who hold authorisation cards are usually politicians, bodyguards, judges, businesspersons and witnesses for court cases. There are severe penalties for illegal self-defence weapon possession, which include a maximum of 10 years imprisonment and fines of up to € 10,000. In 2003 additional legislation was passed, making it mandatory for hunters, using weapons for hunting, to hold a Weapons Registration Card (WRC).<sup>162</sup>

### **Macedonia**

The Weapons Law, passed in January 2005, regulates the possession of weapons and ammunition, by citizens, enterprises and other legal entities and state authorities. Citizens were given a year's leeway to replace old licenses and comply with the new law.<sup>163</sup> There is a dual-license system in place whereby civilians need separate licenses for the procurement / possession and the carrying of firearms. The law permits weapons to be used for self-defence and / or the protection of property; however, weapons must be concealed when carried. The law forbids guns for hunting and sports shooting to be used outside hunting grounds and shooting ranges.

### **Moldova**

The Individual Arms Law, passed in May 1994, regulates the possession of firearms and ammunition. The Moldovan Ministry for Internal Affairs is redrafting it, intending to finalise it by the end of 2005. Weapon possession is legal, for the purposes of self-defence, hunting, or for antique collectors. This is on condition that there is a credible reason for owning a firearm, that the correct storage facilities are in place and that it has been authorised by the police.<sup>164</sup> Minors, and citizens either with a criminal record, a mental health condition or with a history of domestic abuse cannot get authorisation. Article 34-38 of the law lists the specific cases when weapons may be used. The law forbids the use of firearms in public, including celebratory gunfire.

### **Montenegro**

The Arms Law, which regulates the acquisition, possession and carrying of firearms in Montenegro, was passed in 2004. It regulates all types of firearms, their supply, storage, carriage, production, repair, remaking and transportation. According to the new law, a licence for the carrying of weapons will only be issued to official authorised holders, who are performing specific security-related jobs or sporting activities.<sup>165</sup> The law stipulates that weapons be carried in public places in a way that does not disturb citizens, or provoke their disapproval (Article 34), and that weapons for hunting or sports shooting must only be used on a hunting ground or shooting range.

### **Serbia**

The Weapons and Ammunition Law, passed in 1992, regulates possession of firearms. The Ministry for Internal Affairs prohibits the carriage and procurement of weapons without a permit. The law covers a range of weapons, such as weapons used for self-defence, hunting weapons, sports shooting weapons, trophy arms, antiques, etc. They do not issue permits to citizens with criminal records, minors or those under criminal investigation. It is forbidden to carry hunting, shooting sport and special weapons outside hunting grounds and shooting ranges (Article 5). It is also forbidden to use weapons in all places where people's safety may be jeopardised.

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<sup>161</sup> *South Eastern Europe SALW Monitor 2005*, pp. 70-71

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 150-151.

<sup>163</sup> *South Eastern Europe SALW Monitor 2005*, pp. 91-110.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.



## Annex C - Shooting / Gun Clubs in SEE

### Albania

Most of the shooting clubs were established during communism and some retain their old socialist names, such as Studenti, Dinamo, Tirana, Partizani. Pistols and rifles are usually available. Shooting ranges tend to be 25 to 100 metres, but some go up to 200 metres.<sup>166</sup>

### Bulgaria

In early 2004, there were 269 registered gun shops and 67 shooting ranges in the country, and the numbers are growing. Arms trade companies, such as Kintex and VIP Trading, often own shooting ranges.<sup>167</sup> Former world shooting champion, Nonka Matova, also owns a shooting club. Shooting clubs are often more than just a shooting range, for example, VIP Trading has a whole compound with its company offices, two gun stores, and a restaurant alongside the shooting range. The clubs usually offer them a variety of weapons, ammunition and targets, including moving targets, human and circled targets and real-life simulations for gaining practical skills. The Kintex shooting range has approximately 80 different firearms for visitors to use.

### Croatia

There are 191 shooting clubs throughout the country. These make up the Croatian Shooting Association (established in 1948),<sup>168</sup> which organizes competitions, trains shooting coaches and supports the national shooting team. Some clubs, for example Zagreb's Sopot Shooting Club even have an online forum.<sup>169</sup> The number of legal weapons in Croatia that are registered for sports shooting purposes is minimal at only 2.4%.<sup>170</sup>

### Macedonia

Shooting as a sport seems to be the least popular and the most undeveloped in Macedonia than anywhere else in the region. The Macedonian Shooting Federation has 10 registered shooting clubs and 123 individuals actively involved in sports shooting.

### Moldova

Chisinau, Moldova's capital has more than 50 shooting clubs. The majority of them are sports clubs where only pneumatic weapons are used. There are a few elite shooting clubs, which allow shooting with firearms, for example, Magnum GUN Club, owned by the Director of the Pulbere Gun Shop. The minimum cost of renting a firearm (US\$ 2), bullets (US\$ 0.30 each), targets, instruction and the shooting track is about 100 lei (US\$ 8), which in terms of an average salary in Moldova makes it an activity only open to the wealthy. Other entrance restrictions to shooting clubs are minimal: they are open to anyone who is over the age of 12, as long as one is sober, although the clubs do serve alcohol on their premises. Clients are usually 30 to 40 years old and are both male and female.

### Montenegro

The first shooting competition in Montenegro was in 1876, just before the 1876-1878 war against the Ottomans. Many shooting clubs were established in the inter-war period and were responsible for training prominent Montenegrin fighters in WWII. Since the Montenegro Shooting Union was founded, it has trained over 350,000

<sup>166</sup> Personal interview by Elton Skendaj with Ismet Drenova, Chief of Technology Department, Institute of Research and Design for Arms, conducted in Tirana on 11 November 2005.

<sup>167</sup> Kintex is state owned, and is Bulgaria's largest arms export company. VIP Trading is one of Bulgaria's largest arms import companies.

<sup>168</sup> Hrvatski streljački savez (Croatian Shooting Association), see: <<http://www.hrvatski-streljacki.hr/>>.

<sup>169</sup> Streljački klub Sopot Zagreb (Shooting Club Sopot Zagreb), see <<http://www.sksopot.hr/>>.

<sup>170</sup> Official data from the Ministry for Internal Affairs at: <<http://www.mup.hr/>>.



individuals. In 1986, it had 251 shooting clubs enrolled as members and 37,750 individual members. In the 1990s, these figures declined due to the difficult economic situation and conflict.

## **Serbia**

There are six major shooting clubs in Belgrade. They are linked to football clubs of the same name; Red Star and Partizan Shooting Clubs are the two largest. The private shooting range near Belgrade, called BG Sportski Centar Kovilovo, is one of the most modern in SEE. The complex includes a hotel, a swimming pool, a gun store, six shooting ranges for Skeet, Trap and Double Trap events, and one shooting range especially designed for hunters.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> See: <<http://www.bgsck.org.yu/>>.



## Annex D - Hunting

### Albania

Albania has a National Hunters' Association and it produces a magazine called 'Hunting and Nature'. The massive increase in civilian arms possession in 1997 caused a decrease in professional hunting as well as an increase in substantial hunting practices. The Environmental National Agency (ENA) states that, 'in 1997-1998 hunting decreased considerably as a result of the unsafe situation after the 1997 riots, when the number of foreign hunters who used to come to Albania in large numbers reduced to nearly zero.' The ENA also admits that the massive armament of the people during the 1997 riots gave way to massive and unsustainable hunting and poaching.<sup>172</sup>

### Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, special prestige has always been attached to hunting and to using guns for hunting. 'Even before 1989, there were already tens of thousands of weapons. At the end of 1992, individuals had registered 112,976 hunting weapons in Bulgaria. This has not changed significantly since, with 108,704 hunters registered as owning 151,452 hunting weapons.'<sup>173</sup>

### Croatia

Hunting is popular throughout Croatia. In February 1994 the new Law on Hunting was passed.<sup>174</sup> The Croatian Hunting Association is made up of 830 hunting organisations, 50,000 registered individuals and 2,000 hunting apprentices.<sup>175</sup> According to the Ministry for Internal Affairs, 43.81% of all registered weapons in Croatia are hunting rifles. Hunters are permitted to carry a handgun to kill injured animals once they are shot.

### Moldova

The Hunters' and Fishermen's Society (HFS) was established 130 years ago and currently has 12,100 male members and 4 women as members. The HFS, which is a member of the EU's Federation of Hunting and Conserving Synergetic Fauna Associations, has agreed upon the principles of the Hunter's Code. The President of Moldova, Vladimir Voronin, is the Honourable Chairman of HFS. According to *VIP-Magazine*, the President has 30 years experience of hunting and he prefers to hunt with 'his team.' The current Prime Minister, Mr. Vasile Tarlev, is also involved in hunting.

### Serbia and Montenegro

There are numerous hunting clubs in Serbia and Montenegro, especially in rural areas. Some of them are well organized and very active. One interesting finding is that there are 14,801 firearms registered for hunting and sports shooting (according to the Serbian Ministry for Internal Affairs), but there are 449,376 rifles registered in the country.<sup>176</sup> According to the HHS, 44% of gun-owners state that they owned a hunting rifle,<sup>177</sup> indicating that the 449,376 rifles registered by the Ministry of Interior for 'self protection' are in fact hunting rifles. In reality, though, these numbers are not precise, because many dedicated hunters have often more than one hunting rifle, and certainly there are many unregistered hunting rifles.

<sup>172</sup> *Gjendja e Mjedisit ne Shqiperi 1997-1998* (Environmental Condition of Albania 1997-1998). Tirana, Environmental National Agency Report, October 1999, p. 106, at: <[http://enrin.grida.no/htmls/albania/soe1998/docs/soe\\_alb.pdf](http://enrin.grida.no/htmls/albania/soe1998/docs/soe_alb.pdf)>. Accessed on 11 November 2005.

<sup>173</sup> Ministry for Internal Affairs, Bulgaria.

<sup>174</sup> Hunting Law, *Official Gazette* No 10/94, 25/96, 33/97, 44/98, 29/99, and 14/01. The new Hunting Law opted for an older system for leaseholders of hunting territories, prescribing that leaseholders can be both legal entities and physical persons. 70% of hunting associations manage the hunting territories and 30% of tenants are physical persons. At the beginning of Croatian independence in 1991, there were approximately 600 hunting territories. Due to transition to a free market economy, the number of hunting areas has increased to 1,050.

<sup>175</sup> Hrvatski lovački savez (Croatian Hunting Association), at: <<http://www.hrvatski-lovacki-savez.hr/>>.

<sup>176</sup> *Living with the Legacy – SALW Survey of the Republic of Serbia*. UNDP, 2005, p. 11.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.* p. 44



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