



Strengthening parliamentary oversight of the security sector in the Western Balkans

Report

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The Balkans Parliamentary Project, led by the European Leadership Network (ELN), aims to strengthen parliamentary oversight of security policy across the Balkans by providing networking, research, and resources to empower parliamentarians throughout the region. The project addresses both traditional and non-traditional security threats in the region, such as energy insecurity, hybrid threats, and geopolitical instability, by enhancing the expertise and capacity of parliamentarians to oversee security governance effectively. Through activities such as conferences and the creation of a Steering Board consisting of parliamentarians throughout the region, the project fostered cross-border collaboration, shared best practices, and prioritised gender and geographical balance to ensure inclusive, informed decision-making in the governance of security.

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Executive summary

The Western Balkan region stands at a critical juncture, as several states grapple with the threat of autocracy that imperils their democratic institutions and legal frameworks. This study provides an in-depth overview of parliamentary oversight in seven Western Balkan states: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The focus is on the mechanisms for overseeing the security sector, examining legislation and constitutional mandates, political environments, and the roles of parliamentary committees.

While legal frameworks pertaining to security sector governance have been established, with the dual aim of safeguarding both the state and individuals, challenges persist. Historically, security efforts were largely state-centered, but there is now growing recognition of the need to protect individual rights. However, increasingly authoritarian political environments threaten the effectiveness of oversight institutions, as these mechanisms risk being undermined and becoming politicised. Additionally, oversight committees often lack diversity and adequate representation, particularly of women, and are further weakened by the frequent exclusion of opposition members from chairing roles. The security clearance process frequently also lacks independence, creating potential conflicts of interest. Finally, executive dominance, limited resources, and political pressures constrain the effectiveness of parliamentary committees tasked with security sector oversight.

To address these challenges, the study proposes a series of actionable policy recommendations for the Western Balkan states, the European Union (EU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). These recommendations build upon the foundational work already achieved in the region. Liberal democracy is not a static state; it is a dynamic system that demands continuous effort, vigilance, and nurturing to uphold its principles amid evolving political challenges. Therefore, reinforcing and expanding upon previous initiatives is crucial for sustaining progress.

Recommendations for Western Balkan States:

- **Enhance institutional integrity and independence:** strengthen legislative frameworks and implement measures to protect the autonomy of oversight committees to build on existing governance structures.
- **Increase transparency and accountability:** develop robust checks and balances to counter authoritarianism and politicisation. By enhancing transparency and public access to information, the accountability mechanisms that are already in place are strengthened.
- **Enhance capacity and expertise:** continue to invest in training and resources to develop expert staff within parliaments in order to sustain effective oversight. This should include mentorship programs and knowledge-sharing initiatives that leverage existing expertise.
- **Promote inclusivity and representation:** ensure diverse representation in oversight committees, with a focus on increasing female participation and including opposition leaders as chairpersons. This will strengthen democratic oversight and reflect the region's commitment to inclusivity.

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- **Establish independent vetting mechanisms:** develop independent vetting processes to ensure accountability and help avoid conflicts of interest
- **Facilitate regular collaboration:** encourage joint sessions between committees focused on security and EU integration to enhance oversight mechanisms, drawing from successful collaborative models previously implemented in the region.

Recommendations for the EU and NATO:

- **Support institutional capacity building:** the importance of collaborating with organisations that promote security sector governance, such as the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), cannot be overstated. Providing robust technical assistance will help further institutionalise good governance practices.
- **Enhance parliamentary expertise:** allocate resources to develop expert parliamentary staff and organise targeted training workshops for a robust oversight framework. This applies especially to parliamentarians on oversight committees who must be prepared to address evolving security sector challenges, including non-traditional issues such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, hybrid threats, and energy security.
- **Encourage oversight reforms:** advocate for oversight reforms and devise a comprehensive regional strategy tailored to the Balkans to enhance transparency and accountability, building on prior reform efforts.
- **Enhance EU progress reports:** strengthen EU progress reports by explicitly focusing on security sector oversight will be essential in ensuring that democratic standards are upheld and continuously improved upon.
- **Strengthen civil society engagement:** channeling funds and support to organisations monitoring parliamentary oversight is crucial for enhancing public and civil society engagement, drawing from successful civil society initiatives already in place.
- **Counter autocratic tendencies:** support efforts to counter autocratic inclinations and ensure adherence to international treaties to solidify democratic governance in the region, reinforcing existing commitments to democratic principles.

By implementing these recommendations, parliamentary oversight of the security sector in the Western Balkans can be significantly strengthened, further reinforcing democratic governance, and countering the encroachment of autocracy. Recognising that these proposals build upon existing frameworks allows for a more resilient approach to governance, acknowledging that the path to sustained democracy requires continuous commitment and adaptation to new challenges.

1. Introduction

As several Western Balkan states teeter on the edge of autocracy, their democratic institutions face a perilous slide, threatening the very legal frameworks meant to uphold the rule of law. Parliamentary oversight, particularly in the security sector, is both a cause and casualty of this decline, as weakened parliaments fail to hold the executive accountable, further eroding democratic governance. This analysis delves into the intricacies of parliamentary oversight within the seven Western Balkan states of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

Specifically, this study examines the roles, political environment, and constitutional and legislative mandates of parliamentary committees tasked with overseeing the security sector in each of these states. It does so in order to shed light on the challenges impeding effective parliamentary oversight in the region. Key issues such as executive dominance, limited resources, and political pressures are identified and analysed within the context of security sector oversight.

Drawing from these insights, the paper presents actionable policy recommendations aimed at bolstering accountability and transparency within the security sector, thereby safeguarding democratic principles from autocratic backsliding.

This research draws upon a qualitative methodology to analyse these issues. It leverages discussions with members of the European Leadership Network's (ELN) Parliamentary Balkans Group, insights from an ELN roundtable on regional security challenges and cooperation in Southeast Europe,¹ and an extensive literature review of best practices related to parliamentary oversight of the security sector. Over the past three years, the author has spent significant time across the Balkans, particularly in Albania, BiH, Montenegro, and Serbia, engaging in a multitude of discussions – both on and off the record – with a diverse array of high-level Balkan government officials, parliamentarians, thought leaders, local journalists, scholars, and Western diplomats. Furthermore, in an attempt to promote inclusion and diversity of opinion, the author reached out to a minimum of 12 parliamentarians per Western Balkans state who are members of security oversight committees, representing both government and opposition members.

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2. Creeping authoritarianism in the Western Balkans

Liberal democracy is under threat around the globe; the Western Balkan region is no exception.² Autocratic regimes are increasingly becoming more prominent in the region. The European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) should pay attention as democratic backsliding may threaten regional stability. Existing membership in either organisation by some of the Western Balkan states may not be enough to halt or reverse threats to liberal democracy.

The Western Balkan region is frequently described as Europe’s “soft underbelly”.³ For a long time many European and American policy makers have claimed that the best way to promote peace and stability in the region is for all the countries to be integrated into Euro-Atlantic organisations, most notably the EU and the NATO. Of the seven countries under discussion, all of them are EU candidate countries, prospective candidates, or, in the case of Croatia, already an EU member state. As for NATO, Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia are already members, while the rest are aspiring members, except for Serbia, which officially has no intention of joining the military alliance.

This study singles out NATO and the EU because membership in these organisations are highly coveted in the Western Balkans. As demonstrated by the Baltic states, NATO and EU integration hold significant transformational potential leading up to membership. However, membership in these organisations does not automatically ensure good governance, as evidenced by some current member states experiencing democratic backsliding, which also impacts parliamentary oversight in those national contexts. Nevertheless, the fact that most Balkan states are still in the process of integration presents a significant opportunity to promote security sector reforms aligned with good governance and democracy.

It is also important to recognise the critical role played by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in the Balkans. All Western Balkan states are OSCE members, with the exception of Kosovo, which aspires to join. Although the OSCE lacks the leverage (i.e., the ‘carrots and sticks’) that NATO and the EU possess, and therefore receives less attention as a transformative institution, its *Code of conduct on politico-military aspects of security*, while non-binding, is distinctive in providing a normative framework for parliamentary oversight.⁶

Western Balkan States: EU and NATO membership and aspirations

State	EU aspiring member	EU member	NATO aspiring member	NATO member
Albania	Candidate (2014)	-	-	Since 2009
Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)	Candidate (2022)	-	Yes	-
Croatia	-	Since 2013	-	Since 2009
Kosovo	Potential candidate (2017)	-	Yes ⁴	-
Montenegro	Candidate (2010)	-	-	Since 2017
North Macedonia	Candidate (2005)	-	-	Since 2020
Serbia	Candidate (2012)	-	No ⁵	-

The Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG) recently published a report, classifying Serbia and Albania as “electoral autocracies” while describing BiH, North Macedonia, and Montenegro as “weak electoral democracies”.⁷ Similarly, Freedom House’s latest *Nations in Transit* report expressed concern about democratic backsliding, especially in BiH, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The report also noted that “political leaders are using the greater focus on regional security as an excuse to subvert democratic institutions and sidestep democratic norms”.⁸ Six out of the seven Western Balkan countries remain categorised as hybrid or transitional regimes. “Hybrid regime” refers to a government that has components of a democratic regime – such as elections – but where the democratic institutions are weak and there is an element of authoritarianism.⁹

Freedom House gave Croatia the highest democracy score in the Western Balkans, while classifying Serbia as an “autocratising hybrid” state, a term that refers to those regimes in which “[k]ey institutions, from the media to the courts, have gone beyond the level of politicisation expected under classical definitions of hybrid regimes and are now effectively captured by ruling parties and abused for partisan or personal gain”.¹⁰

At the same time, the report classifies Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and BiH as “cyclical hybrids”.¹¹ Such states consist of rival parties that make attempts to capture and weaken democratic institutions, causing states to “ricochet between democratic and autocratic ‘breakthroughs’ without ever seeming to achieve a full consolidation in either direction”.¹²

The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) measures the transformation of democracy and market economy, and the quality of governance.¹³ The latest report made reference to a number of positive developments in Albania, Croatia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia, but also observed significant declines of governance scores for Serbia and Montenegro. It went on to express concerns over BiH, which remains vulnerable.

Several external actors, especially Russia, China and Hungary, negatively influence the autocratic shift in the Western Balkans. Most notably, Russia acts as a spoiler in the region, for instance by spreading disinformation and anti-Western propaganda via Sputnik and Russia Today.¹⁴

Nonetheless, autocracy in the Western Balkans is not always fuelled by the usual suspects. Some EU and US actions (or lack thereof) have also negatively impacted democratisation processes.¹⁵ US and EU support and appeasement of Aleksandar Vučić’s regime in Belgrade is particularly concerning given its democratic backsliding. It is likely to have lasting consequences, both for Serbia and regional stability.

Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI)

State	Political transformation	Economic transformation	Governance Index
Albania ¹⁶	7.50 – defective democracy	7.04 – advanced	6.56 – good
BiH ¹⁷	5.55 – highly defective democracy	6.29 – limited	3.64 – weak
Croatia ¹⁸	8.55 – democracy in consolidation	8.57 – highly advanced	6.17 – good
Kosovo ¹⁹	6.80 – defective democracy	6.04 – limited	5.22 – moderate
Montenegro ²⁰	7.10 – defective democracy	7.14 – advanced	5.93 – good
North Macedonia ²¹	7.75 – defective democracy	7.18 – advanced	6.27 – good
Serbia ²²	6.05 – defective democracy	6.64 – limited	4.43 – moderate

A recent opinion poll by the International Republican Institute (IRI) reveals a notable trend across the Western Balkans: there is generally high trust in the army, reflecting a strong confidence in military institutions more broadly. The police also receive a moderate level of trust, though less pronounced. In stark contrast, parliamentary institutions are widely distrusted, with high levels of skepticism and dissatisfaction evident in multiple countries. This disparity highlights a regional pattern of robust support for security forces coupled with significant concerns about political governance.²³ Consequently, the low trust in parliamentary bodies underscores the need for targeted reforms and initiatives to address governance challenges and enhance political stability in the Western Balkans.

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Trust and distrust of key institutions²⁴

Country	Institution	Don't know/ refused	Distrust a great deal	Somewhat distrust	Somewhat trust	Trust a great deal
Albania	Army	12%	22%	14%	33%	18%
Albania	Police	2%	21%	15%	50%	13%
Albania	Parliament	2%	57%	20%	18%	4%
BiH	Army	4%	13%	20%	41%	23%
BiH	Police	1%	8%	17%	50%	25%
BiH	Parliament	4%	36%	32%	24%	4%
Croatia	Army	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Croatia	Police	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Croatia	Parliament	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Kosovo	Army	1%	6%	2%	13%	78%
Kosovo	Police	1%	6%	4%	24%	65%
Kosovo	Parliament	3%	23%	25%	37%	13%
Montenegro	Army	3%	11%	22%	46%	17%
Montenegro	Police	1%	14%	30%	44%	11%
Montenegro	Parliament	2%	20%	31%	39%	8%
North Macedonia	Army	5%	17%	18%	44%	16%
North Macedonia	Police	1%	25%	26%	39%	8%
North Macedonia	Parliament	1%	51%	26%	21%	2%
Serbia	Army	2%	14%	40%	40%	N/A
Serbia	Police	1%	13%	21%	42%	24%
Serbia	Parliament	2%	31%	23%	30%	13%

Strengthening parliamentary oversight of the security sector could serve as a crucial pillar to prevent further democratic decline.

Strengthening parliamentary oversight of the security sector could serve as a crucial pillar to prevent further democratic decline. This paper will explore the role of parliamentary oversight in the security sector, examine the situation in each Western Balkans state, and highlight how NATO and EU support could bolster parliamentary oversight and counter democratic backsliding.

3. Oversight of the security sector

The emergence of advanced technologies – ranging from drones and artificial intelligence (AI) to sophisticated disinformation campaigns – has fundamentally transformed the oversight landscape.

Traditional concepts of security centered around defence of the sovereignty of the state, usually against military aggression. However, the concept of security has evolved to also include security of people, or the protection of individual freedoms.²⁵ These two concepts of security need not be mutually exclusive. Security sector reform (SSR) attempts to bridge the gap between these concepts of security as it seeks to apply principles of good governance to the security sector in order to guarantee security both for the state and the people.²⁶

The security sector includes a multitude of state institutions, civil authorities, criminal justice agencies, and non-statutory security forces. Oversight over the security sector generally includes the armed forces, police, gendarmeries, presidential guards, intelligence services, coast guards, border guards, customs, and immigration authorities, and reserve or local units, prisons, probation services, and private security services.

The emergence of advanced technologies – ranging from drones and artificial intelligence (AI) to sophisticated disinformation campaigns – has fundamentally transformed the oversight landscape. These modern tools and tactics introduce a host of new complexities that oversight bodies must navigate, necessitating the development of updated strategies and specialised expertise. To effectively address these challenges, oversight mechanisms must adapt to ensure they remain relevant and capable of safeguarding democratic principles in an increasingly intricate security environment.

Akin to the principles of representation, law making, and control of the budget process, oversight is a core function of parliaments, especially in liberal democracies. Oversight provides the means to promote checks and balances, and to hold the executive arms of government accountable.²⁷

Ideally, parliamentary oversight committees should exhibit the following features:²⁸

- Adherence to established rules of procedure governing their functioning and powers;
- Autonomy in determining their schedules, including agenda setting, meeting dates, and frequency, as well as the ability to propose and modify legislation;
- Access to comprehensive information necessary for fulfilling their mandate, encompassing classified data crucial for overseeing the security sector;
- Capacity to incorporate minority viewpoints through the utilisation of minority reports;
- Regular collaboration with other pertinent committees, such as those focusing on defence, home affairs, budgetary matters, human rights, and foreign affairs;
- Leadership by a senior parliamentarian with a background in defence and security policy, preferably from an opposition party;

- Authority to convene hearings on any relevant subject;
- Power to compel ministers and both civilian and military experts to provide testimony during hearings;
- Effective utilisation of expertise from academia, civil society organisations, and external to the government; and
- Possession of dedicated meeting facilities, staffing, budgetary allocation, and documentation resources.

Parliamentary committees can broadly be divided into two groups: those with dedicated security mandates, such as a committee on intelligence oversight, and ones with a broad mandate that may also impact on the work of security sector institutions, such as a committee on budget and finance or human rights. This paper predominantly focuses on the former, but the second type of committees are also mentioned as they ought to play crucial roles in security sector governance.

The starting point for assessing parliamentary oversight committees is to evaluate their legal mandates, without which parliaments have no authority to exercise oversight over the security sector.²⁹ Other important factors to consider are not just whether parliaments have oversight on paper, but whether they have the capacity, resources, and support to fulfil their mandates in practice. As such, political will to support parliament's oversight roles is also an important factor to take into account. A central question of this paper is therefore not simply whether Balkan states possess the necessary legal frameworks for parliamentary oversight, but whether these structures are genuinely empowered or exist merely as a form of tokenism.

Ever since the collapse of the former Yugoslavia, the EU and NATO have been providing some form of SSR support to the region. As such, Albania, BiH, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia have embarked on SSR as part of their Euro-Atlantic integration. These efforts have been complemented by OSCE support through capacity building and training, advisory services, policy and border management reform, promoting democratic oversight, strengthening legislative frameworks, advancing the rule of law and human rights, and a range of country-specific initiatives.³⁰

Each NATO aspirant has an individual partnership action plan (IPAP) designed to support domestic reforms, and a membership action plan (MAP), which provides advice, assistance and support. Additionally, the EU arguably possesses the most weight to promote SSR in the Western Balkans. This is largely due to conditionality, accompanied by significant resources, that could transform aspiring members.³¹ SSR is funded from a variety of EU streams, including the Common Foreign Security Policy (CFSP) budget, the European Development Fund (EDF), the Instruments contributing to Peace and Stability (IcSP), and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).³²

The EU's Stabilisation and Accession Process (SAP) is the main framework for preparing Western Balkans for EU membership. Aspiring EU member states each have a Stabilisation Association

Agreement (SAA). SAAs are based on the EU acquis, the body of common rights and obligations that binds all EU member states. In terms of promoting SSR during a country's accession negotiations, Chapter 24 (on justice, freedom and security) and Chapter 31 (on foreign, security and defence policies) are most relevant.³³

The following sections will analyse the institutional structures and mechanisms for parliamentary oversight of the security sector in the Western Balkan states. Some of the cross-cutting themes identified by this research include:

- **Rising authoritarianism:** increasing authoritarianism and illiberal democracy threaten human security and compromise oversight institutions;
- **Politicisation of oversight:** oversight mechanisms are at risk of being politicised, undermining their effectiveness and eroding their integrity;
- **Opposition and gender representation:** in some Balkan states, ruling party members chair oversight committees, weakening checks and balances. Women are also grossly underrepresented in security committees, especially in leadership roles, which hinders the development of inclusive and effective security policies;
- **Oversight culture:** a lack of genuine oversight culture, compounded by historical mistrust and denial of past atrocities, hampers effective scrutiny;
- **Technical skills:** advances in technology - such as AI, cyber security, surveillance technologies, disinformation - demand advanced technical skills for effective security sector oversight; and
- **Security certificates:** staff and committee members often require clearance from the very bodies they oversee, creating a conflict of interest.

3.1 Albania

In Albania, 63% of the population trusts the police, 51% trust the army, while only 22% of people trust parliament. This highlights a notable disparity, with the security sector being much more trusted than the political institution.³⁴

In terms of its constitution, the sections most relevant to security sector governance include:³⁵

- **Part one on basic principles:** this section emphasises that Albania is a parliamentary republic which is based on the principles of the rule of law, democracy, and the separation of powers, which provide the foundation for parliamentary oversight.

- Part two on fundamental human rights and freedoms: parliamentary oversight often involves ensuring that security sector activities respect fundamental human rights and freedoms outlined in this section.
- Part three on the assembly: this provides that parliament (Kuvendi) is a key organ responsible for legislation, oversight, and representation, including oversight of the security sector.
- Part thirteen on public finances: oversight of assets may include parliamentary scrutiny of financial resources allocated to the security sector.

Albania's parliament consists of 140 deputies. The parliamentary oversight of the security sector is primarily conducted by the National Security Committee, Committee on Foreign Policy, Committee for Legal Affairs, Public Administration and Human Rights, Committee for European Affairs, and the Committee for Economy and Finance. These committees should play crucial roles in overseeing various aspects of the security sector, including oversight of government, defence, foreign relations, legal matters, human rights, and alignment with international standards and agreements. Still, the European Commission's most recent report on Albania warned that "[p]arliamentary oversight of the executive remained limited".³⁶

In the context of security sector governance, the National Security Committee is especially significant (its responsibilities are outlined in the table below).³⁷ It is chaired by a member of Albania's ruling Socialist Party (SP) while the deputy chair is from the Democratic Party, an opposition party.³⁸ Chairpersons of parliamentary committees are particularly important as they usually have a lot of power. They tend to set the agenda, they influence whether a bill advances out of committee, is amended, or is tabled indefinitely, and they have the power to control hearings and investigations. As such, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe stipulates that committees in charge of security sector and budget oversight ought to be chaired by an opposition member in order to strengthen parliamentary oversight.

Albania does not specifically have a parliamentary committee dedicated to oversight of the intelligence sector. According to the Centre for European Security Studies (CESS), although the task should be done by the Committee on National Security and Defence, in practice, this committee focuses largely on intelligence-related legislation, and does not truly focus on oversight and accountability of intelligence activities.³⁹

Recently, Albania also created a new committee that will be tasked with fighting foreign interference and disinformation in the public sphere.⁴⁰ Details of the exact nature and roles of the Committee on Disinformation are ambiguous, but it will essentially aim to scrutinise media disinformation, foreign funding, and adherence to legal transparency in democratic practices, particularly election financing. Critics like Blerjana Bino, executive director of Tirana-based Centre for Science and Innovation for Development, are nervous that the new committee may however impact freedom of the press, which is particularly concerning in the context of previous attempts by the government to silence critical voices.⁴¹

It is yet to be seen how the new Committee on Disinformation will operate. However, to ensure that it does not become politicised and target domestic critics, Albania should align with the EU Digital Services Act (DSA), which regulates online intermediaries and platforms such as marketplaces, social networks, content-sharing platforms, app stores, and online travel and accommodation platforms. DSA's main goal is to prevent illegal and harmful activities online and the spread of disinformation. It also aims to protect fundamental human rights, including the right to privacy.⁴²

Albania's Parliamentary Committees

Committee name	Area of responsibility	Number of members	Female
National Security Committee ⁴³	Organisation of national defence and the armed forces; military cooperation; internal affairs; civil emergencies; public order; secret services; and implementation of UN sustainable development agenda.	22	4
Special Committee on Disinformation	To be determined	NA	NA
Committee on Foreign Policy ⁴⁴	Foreign policy; international relations and cooperation; implementation of international agreements; and UN sustainable development agenda.	16	5
Committee for Legal Affairs, Public Administration and Human Rights ⁴⁵	Codes and organisation of judicial power; public administration; local government; human rights; and the UN sustainable development agenda.	28	8
Committee for European Affairs ⁴⁶	European integration; legislation alignment with EU acquis; supervision of EU financial assistance; and UN sustainable development agenda.	18	9
Committee for Economy and Finance ⁴⁷	Economic policies; state Budget; public finances; privatisations; banking system; and UN sustainable development agenda.	21	9

Notably, gender representation is particularly poor among the more traditional security sector oversight committee compared to some of the others. Only 4 out of 22 members of the National Security Committee are female members while only 5 out of 16 of the Committee on Foreign Policy's members are female.

Considering that Albania experienced five decades of authoritarian rule that only ended in 1991, the country has made good progress over the last few years in terms of improving its overall governance. Key reforms include the professionalisation of its armed forces, improved coordination with NATO, and the establishment of civilian oversight mechanisms. However, there are still major concerns regarding high levels of corruption and state capture by political parties. The authors of Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group's (BiEPAG) recent publication, *Beyond Stabilitocracy*, express concern

that political parties continue to use state institutions, including parliament and the judiciary, to score political points against their opponents. There also seems to be a preference for weak institutions, leading to weak oversight.⁴⁸

According to Fatmir Mediu, an Albanian MP and former Minister of Defence (2005 to 2008), oversight committees seem to operate on an ad hoc basis in spite of their important work.⁴⁹ It shows a lack of commitment towards governance and an underdeveloped culture of oversight, apathetic to providing proper accountability of the security sector. As such, in practice, the National Security Committee operates more as an advisory board with limited capacity to fulfil its mandate, and it lacks the seriousness that proper oversight would require.

The European Commission also recently reported that “[p]arliamentary oversight of the work of independent institutions [in Albania] remains limited to considering their annual reports...”.⁵⁰ The report further noted that Parliamentary oversight of the government’s performance, including that of its subordinate agencies, requires strengthening, and that the regulatory and institutional mechanisms for monitoring, as well as the reporting framework for government performance, remain fragmented. In addition, Mediu opines that in order for parliamentary oversight over the security sector to be effective, Albania needs a more permanent structure charged with some of the same functions, which will allow it to genuinely fulfil some of the responsibilities – oversight, requesting information, research and analysis, and recommendations - within its mandate.⁵¹

Ferdinand Xhaferaj, an Albanian MP, also highlighted several key challenges faced by parliamentary oversight bodies in effectively monitoring the security sector. Xhaferaj pointed out that “political factors often intervene, weakening the committee’s authority... The main challenge is handling political influence, which prevents the committee from exercising its constitutional oversight role professionally.”⁵² He also noted that “the Westminster model of government fusion with the ruling majority, in a context of weak internal democracy within political parties, is a significant obstacle. The electoral system since 2009 uses a closed-list regional proportional system, allowing party leaders to control candidate lists. This undermines the committee’s independence.”⁵³ He opines that “legislators elected through closed party lists tend to follow party leaders’ orders, and members of the ruling coalition often show unwillingness to engage in oversight”.⁵⁴

According to Mediu, another important creeping issue related to the above point is the increasing politicisation of the security sector. The executive branch is incrementally using the security sector in order to do the bidding of government, thereby threatening Albania’s democracy.⁵⁵ Government seems to operate on the assumption that all matters related to security sector falls within the domain of government – the executive authority – so parliament is increasingly playing a more limited role.⁵⁶ Mediu is concerned that the situation is worsening, and that there is a risk that Albania may be drifting slowly towards authoritarianism.⁵⁷ It should be noted that Freedom House has classified Albania as a “hybrid regime” as it harbours “elements of both democracy and authoritarianism.”⁵⁸

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In terms of capacity, members of parliament do not always have expertise on security issues, nor sufficient expert staff to support them. The new security environment is becoming more complicated, necessitating the need for specialised expertise among parliamentarians on the relevant committees and among staff that can support them.⁵⁹

Xhaferaj also emphasised resource limitations as a significant hurdle, stating that “the committee lacks adequate resources to exercise effective oversight. Staff appointments are politically motivated rather than based on merit and professionalism. There is an insufficient budget to use external expertise”.⁶⁰

A product of Albania’s communist past is that it is still trapped in a mentality of secrecy and lacks a culture of transparency. Consequently, information and budgets tend to be overclassified – with information sometimes being classified as an excuse for a lack of transparency – which hinders accountability.⁶¹ Parliamentarians, particularly from opposition parties, including those with security clearance, find it particularly hard to access information when they request it from the security sector.⁶² As an example, there was a case of equipment – IMSI Catcher - bought by the government to allegedly intercept communication of leaders of political parties, heads of government institutions, and journalists.⁶³ In this case, confidentiality was used as an excuse for a long time to withhold information from parliament.⁶⁴

Related to the issue of secrecy, according to the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, in the Western Balkans, Albania has the least transparent military budget, with only very general categories visible to the public.⁶⁵ The lack of public scrutiny increases the importance of parliamentary oversight to hold government accountable.

Ferdinand Xhaferaj emphasised the need for reforms to strengthen parliamentary oversight, particularly the democratisation of political parties. He stated; “[e]ven though the European Commission, through the EU membership agenda, provides significant funds for consolidating governmental institutions, nothing is allocated for the democratisation of political parties. A party with internal democratic deficiencies will inevitably reflect such weaknesses in its governance, as is currently happening in Albania. Therefore, democratising political parties is an essential reform.”⁶⁶

3.2 BiH

Following the Bosnian war (1992 to 1995), the Dayton peace process set up a highly complicated state with Annex 4 of the agreement becoming BiH’s Constitution.⁶⁷ In essence, BiH is severely weighed down by several tiers of government, including the state, two federal entities, which includes the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and Republika Srpska (RS), and a condominium (Brčko District), cantons, and municipalities.⁶⁸ There is also frequent overlap between executive and legislative powers from the state level all the way down to the municipal level, which overall creates a complicated, indecisive, dysfunctional, and expensive system.

Support for EU membership is relatively strong in BiH, and a large group of Bosnians support NATO integration. However, most Bosnian Serbs are vehemently anti-NATO, with 88% of them viewing the organisation as playing a negative role according to a recent IRI poll.⁶⁹

While the police in BiH are trusted by 75% of the population and the army by 64%, only 28% of Bosnians express trust in the parliament.⁷⁰

The most relevant sections in the BiH Constitution relating to security sector governance include:

- The preamble: sets the context for the establishment of BiH as a democratic state committed to the principles of peace, justice, and reconciliation.
- Article III on human rights and fundamental freedoms: guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms to all citizens, including those related to security such as the right to life, liberty, and security of person. It also prohibits discrimination, which is crucial in ensuring equitable treatment within the security sector.
- Article V on the presidency: directly addresses authority over the armed forces, and their role in ensuring the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security of the country. It also mandates the Standing Committee on Military Matters to coordinate the activities of the armed forces.

Interestingly, BiH's Constitution—the highest law of the land—makes no mention of the police, intelligence services, or prison authorities. This notable omission leaves critical areas of the security sector undefined at the constitutional level.

Beyond the Constitution, the Dayton Peace Accords (DPA) also play a significant role in shaping governance, particularly in the security sector.⁷¹ Specifically, *Annex 1A on the Military aspects of the peace settlement* establishes the framework for the armed forces' structure and operations, directly influencing the security sector. However, like the Constitution, the DPA lacks any references to intelligence agencies or prison authorities, and the guidance on police operations is relatively weak.

The DPA charged the High Representative and the Office of the High Representative (OHR) to oversee civilian implementation of the Dayton agreement. Additionally, the Bonn Powers provide the High Representative with the ability to adopt binding decisions and to remove public officials who violate the DPA.⁷²

While the police in BiH are trusted by 75% of the population and the army by 64%, only 28% of Bosnians express trust in the parliament.

BiH Parliamentary Committees

Level	Committee	Responsibilities	Members	
			Members	Female
State	Joint Committee on Defence and Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina ⁷³	Oversees implementation of security and defence policy; supervises defence and security institutions; monitors compliance with human rights; reviews reports and budgets related to Armed Forces and security agencies; and cooperates with international organisations on defence matters.	12	2
State	Joint Committee for Supervision of the Work of the Intelligence and Security Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina ⁷⁴	Supervises legality of the Intelligence and Security Agency's work; reviews Agency's leadership appointments and budgets; and conducts investigations into the Agency's operations.	12	2
State	Joint Commission for European Integration ⁷⁵	Considers issues related to European integration and EU accession process; monitors harmonisation of laws with EU standards; reviews plans and reports on EU integration; and conducts public hearings on European integration issues.	12	2
State	Joint Committee for Human Rights ⁷⁶	Considers issues related to realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms; monitors citizenship, immigration, and refugees; reviews reports on human rights and children's rights; and conducts investigations into human rights violations.	12	3
Entity	Security Committee of the National Assembly of the Republic of Srpska ⁷⁷	Examines state of defence preparations and proposes security policy measures; monitors security bodies' activities and legal projects in security; participates in security budget discussions and monitors budget implementation; conducts parliamentary supervision on security issues and cooperates with related institutions; and analyses emergency situations and natural disasters, proposing measures.	7	0
Federal Entity	Security Committee of the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina ⁷⁸	Considers system and policy issues in the area of security; proposes measures for organising, managing, and developing the security of the Federation; deals with issues of combating terrorism, inter-cantonal crime, unauthorised drug trade, and organised crime; reviews drafts and proposals of laws and other general acts regulating the security area of the Federation; and Conducts investigations.	11	2
District	Committee for Public Safety and Supervision of the Police of the Assembly of Brcko District ⁷⁹	Examines the state of security and policing in the Brcko District; monitors the activities and budgets of security and police forces; participates in discussions on security policy and legal projects; conducts oversight to ensure adherence to laws and regulations; cooperates with domestic and international institutions on security matters; and analyses and proposes measures for emergency situations and natural disasters.	7	1

According to European Commission, parliamentary oversight over the executive authority in BiH remains 'weak'; it notes that "[t]here is no parliamentary monitoring of compliance with the recommendations of independent institutions or of their annual reports".⁸⁰ This undermines the accountability and effectiveness of oversight mechanisms.

At the state level, while the entire Parliamentary Assembly – comprising the House of Representatives and the House of Peoples – holds general oversight over governmental institutions, oversight of the security sector specifically falls under the purview of two key bodies: the Joint Committee on Defence and Security (JCDS), and the Committee for Supervision of the Work of the Intelligence and Security Agency.⁸¹

The JCDS consists of people from all three of BiH's 'constituent people'; that is Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs. Of the current 12 members, only 2 are female. The JCDS is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the country's security and defence policy, ensuring its effectiveness, transparency, and functionality through parliamentary supervision. It also monitors a range of institutions, including the Ministry of Defence, the Armed Forces, and various security agencies such as the Ministry of Security, Border Police, and SIPA.⁸² JCDS's work is complimented by the Office of the Parliamentary Military Commissioner (PMC), which plays an important oversight and accountability role, specifically focused on the armed forces.⁸³ This institution serves as an independent body that reports directly to the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH. PMC also has the ability to recommend legislative changes, and even to investigate complaints by members of the military.

As for the Joint Committee for Supervision of the Work of the Intelligence and Security Agency of BiH, it consists of 12 members, of which only 2 are female. It supervises the Agency's legality, reviews appointments for General Director and Deputy General Director, evaluates reports on issues and resolutions within the Agency, analyses budget spending, gives opinions on the budget proposal, reviews the Chief Inspector's reports, seeks expert advice for supervision, and conducts investigations into the agency's work.⁸⁴

Other state bodies that also play indirect roles in oversight roles arguably include the Committee on European Integration, and the Committee for Human Rights. Collectively, these bodies should monitor activities, policies, and expenditure of the security sector, ensure accountability, transparency, and adherence to democratic principles. They also conduct hearings, inquiries and investigations to assess the security sector and they have the prerogative to propose legislative reforms or recommendations. At the same time, as can be seen from the table above, each of the two entities - FBiH and RS – as well as Brčko District, have oversight committees whose roles frequently overlaps with the state committees. Overall, as is evident from the table above, BiH's traditional security oversight committees have very poor female representation.

According to Šemsudin Mehmedović, member of the JCDS, staff in all the agencies are generally cooperative whenever information is requested, as it is their legal obligation to do so. Therefore, according to Mehmedović, accessing information is not a

significant problem. However, a challenge arises from the fact that members of the committees often lack the necessary skills and understanding to effectively assess the information they receive. This skills gap limits the ability of the committees to conduct thorough and informed oversight.⁸⁵

The above problem also relates to shortage of both material resources and expert staff within the JCDS and PMC, which hinders these bodies' ability to conduct thorough oversight activities. "For instance, the Office of the PMC does not have a functional database to capture and monitor developments within its scope of responsibility, leading to inefficiencies in monitoring and implementing recommendations".⁸⁶ Ultimately, "[t]he absence of adequate resources directly impacts the quality and depth of parliamentary scrutiny."⁸⁷

When irregularities are discovered, the standard procedure is to first request a hearing where the head of the relevant agency is called to report to the committee. Based on the findings from this hearing, the committee decides whether the issue should be escalated to the parliament, courts, or other appropriate bodies. Both the JCDS and the PMC submit their reports to parliament annually.⁸⁸ These reports are crucial for maintaining transparency and accountability, but the effectiveness of this oversight is hindered by the aforementioned challenges related to resource constraints and the expertise levels of committee members.

According to Mehmedović, compared to the Committee for Intelligence, the JCDS handles various reports and responsibilities, such as reviewing the budget report, adopting the budget, and considering the General Inspector's report on appeals related to the institution's work. It also addresses any incidents within their competence, discussing and investigating them separately.⁸⁹ Compared to the Committee for Intelligence, the JCDS holds meetings more frequently due to its broad oversight responsibilities, which include the police, public sector agencies, and other busy institutions. In contrast, the Committee for Intelligence typically meets once every three months, although they can convene more frequently if necessary. Any committee member can call for a meeting, but the chair and deputy chair have the authority to decide whether to hold the session, which means they could theoretically block it.⁹⁰ However, it should be noted that in 2022 the JCDS merely held three sessions (down from six the previous year, and ten in 2020), while the Committee for Intelligence did not meet a single time.⁹¹

In terms of challenges to parliamentary oversight, the complexity of BiH's political structure can lead to fragmented oversight mechanisms, making it difficult to coordinate and effectively oversee the security sector at the national level. At the same time, BiH's ethnic divisions impede effective parliamentary oversight as political parties tend to prioritise ethnic interests over national concerns. As argued by Mirza Buljubašić, a criminologist from the University of Sarajevo, a significant source of challenge to parliamentary oversight is "the [DPA] and its complex framework that does not allow further democratisation and rather preferring the ethnocracy and ethnic partocracy".⁹²

Politicisation of security sector oversight bodies severely impacts their effectiveness.⁹³ As argued by Buljubašić, "[t]his political

As a result of deep politicisation and a complicated structure, BiH experiences a slow pace of adopting key security sector legislation and the inadequate implementation of the recommendations and conclusions issued by oversight bodies are significant challenges.

influence often affects the objectivity and independence of the oversight process, leading to partial or biased decisions”.⁹⁴ Šemsudin Mehmedović similarly asserts that BiH’s constitutional structure, established by the DPA, has led to significant political interference and attempts to obstruct the work of various committees, particularly on matters concerning the entity level.⁹⁵

This structure requires both ethnic and entity majorities for decisions, which is often exploited, resulting in political stalemates. A prime example is the failed attempt to pass a law establishing a 112-emergency number on par with EU member states, similar to the US 911 system, due to opposition from Republika Srpska, which refuses to integrate into BiH and continues to promote secession.⁹⁶

As a result of deep politicisation and a complicated structure, BiH experiences a slow pace of adopting key security sector legislation and the inadequate implementation of the recommendations and conclusions issued by oversight bodies are significant challenges. “A substantial portion of the recommendations by the JCDS and PMC remains unimplemented, especially those that require political will and [budgetary] support. For example, during a four-year period [2016 to 2020], less than 30% of the conclusions and recommendations issued by the JCDS were fully realised by the executive defence and security actors”.⁹⁷

These issues also stifle BiH’s path toward EU and NATO integration. Efforts to pass related legislation are frequently blocked by identity politics, hindering progress. The politicisation extends to even the simplest issues, where the political framework hampers effective governance and necessary reforms. This political gridlock highlights the inherent flaws in the DPA’s structure, which, while initially successful in ending conflict, now impedes the country’s development and integration into broader international frameworks. At present, as argued by a recent House of Commons research briefing, Republika Srpska is intensifying secession moves, which threatens not only BiH stability, but also that of the Balkan region.⁹⁸ Gridlocks will therefore likely persist.

To address decision-making deadlocks, the High Representative could leverage his authority to reform the procedures of both houses of parliament, making the legislative process more efficient. This could involve introducing mechanisms to reduce the need for consensus on all decisions, particularly on non-controversial issues, thereby expediting the decision-making process.⁹⁹

Jasmin Mujanović, a Bosnian scholar, also laments that a key obstacle to parliamentary oversight is the “broader clientalistic nature of the political party system in BiH”. He posits that “[f]ew MPs have any meaningful autonomy in their legislative work and so the process of oversight is largely dependent on the priorities of the leading political parties in the country”.¹⁰⁰

Moreover, Mujanović also notes that “[f]ew of these [political parties] in turn have any interest in meaningfully improving the governance process - especially hardline actors like the [Bosnian Serb Alliance of Independent Social Democrats and Croatian Democratic Union of BiH]”.¹⁰¹ He contends that “the role of their respective representatives on these bodies revolves largely around extracting political prizes for their respective blocs and their leaders”.¹⁰²

Additionally, Mirza Buljubašić notes that “there is a notable lack of trust and cooperation between the oversight bodies and the security and defence institutions”.¹⁰³ Consequently, “[t]his deficit in trust makes it difficult to establish a transparent and accountable oversight mechanism, thereby weakening the overall efficacy of parliamentary oversight”.¹⁰⁴

3.3 Croatia

Croatia is a member of both NATO and the EU, and in terms of democratisation, it has made tremendous progress over the past two decades. However, membership of Atlanticist organisations does not make the country immune to democratic backsliding. Critics are accusing Croatia of ‘Orbanisation’ - that is, that the government of Croatia is adopting laws that are following in the footsteps of Hungary’s Viktor Orban, which threaten democratic institutions.¹⁰⁵

Notably, Croatia recently adopted new media gag laws, which could have major negative implications in the ability of journalists to cover corruption.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, there is a growing concern about Russian influence through oligarchs’ money and links between certain political parties and Russian actors.¹⁰⁷

The Croatian parliament is deeply mistrusted. A study found that just 21% of Croatian respondents expressed trust in their parliament, compared to 34% of respondents across the EU.¹⁰⁸ Although there is no recent survey on the level of trust among Croatians with respect to the police and army, those institutions historically have enjoyed a high level of trust among the populace.¹⁰⁹ The low-level of trust in parliament possibly relates to democratic backsliding, which has characterised Croatia’s post-EU trajectory.¹¹⁰ It serves as a vivid reminder that democracy, even as an EU member, is not a permanent state, but a process that requires constant nurturing.

Some of the key sections in Croatia’s Constitution relating to security sector governance can be found in the following sections:¹¹¹

- Article III on human rights and fundamental freedoms: establishes fundamental rights and freedoms.
- Articles 7: outlines the organisation of the armed forces and their subordination to civilian authority. Participation of the armed forces in missions outside Croatia is also subject to parliamentary approval.
- Article 80 on the Croatian parliament: stipulates that parliament is responsible for the adoption of laws, the state budget, and decisions on war and peace. It also charges the parliament with the responsibility to develop the National Security Strategy and the Defence Strategy, and to exercise civilian oversight over the security sector.

Mirza Buljubašić notes that “there is a notable lack of trust and cooperation between the oversight bodies and the security and defence institutions”.

In Croatia, several parliamentary committees play oversight roles with regards to the security sector, including the Defence Committee, Domestic Policy and National Security Committee, Foreign Affairs Committee, European Affairs Committee, and the Committee on Human and National Minority Rights. Through their work, they are responsible for monitoring the activities of security agencies, reviewing legislation related to national security, and conducting investigations into security-related matters. Collectively, they contribute to the protection of fundamental rights, the promotion of security policies, and the maintenance of public trust in government institutions.

Croatia's Parliamentary Committees

Committee name	Scope of work and oversight roles	Number of members	Number of females
Defence Committee ¹¹²	Determining and monitoring defence policy implementation; defence co-operation; and other defence matters.	19	2
Domestic Policy and National Security Committee ¹¹³	Determining and monitoring policy implementation on matters related to internal affairs;; oversight of police; state and public security; and other internal policy and national security matters.	13	3
Foreign Affairs Committee ¹¹⁴	Matters of foreign policy and international relations; monitoring EU Common Foreign and Security Policy; consideration of international security cooperation agreements; oversight of foreign policy decisions related to national security; and co-operation with other countries' parliamentary committees in security matters.	14	5
European Affairs Committee ¹¹⁵	Monitoring parliamentary activities in European affairs; alignment of Croatian legal system with EU acquis; monitoring EU legislation related to security; participating in debates on Croatia's positions in EU security policies; and co-operation with EU institutions and other national parliaments' committees on security issues.	17	9
Committee on Human and National Minority Rights ¹¹⁶	Implementation of human rights treaties; exercise and protection of human rights and freedoms; oversight of government actions related to human rights and freedoms; monitoring implementation of measures for protecting rights of national minorities; and co-operation with relevant organisations in promoting human rights and ethnic rights.	15	4

One of the primary obstacle is not accessing information about the security sector, but rather the reluctance of committee members to exercise their right to obtain and review this information, which limits their oversight role.

From a parliamentary oversight perspective, one of the most important security sector committees in Croatia is its Defence Committee. It is responsible for formulating and overseeing the implementation of defence-related policies. In its legislative and regulatory functions, it acts as the competent body on matters including the organisation of state defence institutions, and it is responsible for cooperation with Croatian defence bodies.¹¹⁷ By law, it is chaired by a member of the opposition, and at present, consists of 19 members, including only two females.

The Domestic Policy and National Security Committee also plays a pertinent role. It is chaired by a member of the opposition, and the committee of 13 members includes 3 females. Furthermore, it is responsible for determining and monitoring the implementation of policies, as well as enacting legislation and other regulations within its scope of work. This includes overseeing the structure and authority of state administration bodies in the field of internal affairs, overseeing the police, and managing issues related to citizenship and the personal status of citizens.¹¹⁸ The Committee also supervises the security-intelligence system in accordance with the law, with a particular focus on protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms as established by the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia.

Matko Kuzmanić, Croatian MP, highlights that Croatia boasts one of the best oversight systems in the region, characterised by its democratic, efficient, and overall sound structure. A unique aspect of this system is the civilian oversight of the security sector.¹¹⁹ The Council for Civilian Oversight of Security-Intelligence Agencies is responsible for monitoring the legality of the Security and Intelligence Agency's (SOA) activities. It oversees the covert information-gathering measures that may restrict constitutional rights and freedoms, and reports its findings to the National Security Council, the Speaker of Parliament, the head of the relevant committee, and the SOA Director.¹²⁰ Moreover, parliamentary oversight is conducted by a committee chaired by a member of the opposition, thereby promoting more rigorous checks on government actions. Gordan Akrap, Assistant Rector at the Dr. Franjo Tuđman Defence and Security University, agrees that Croatia has strong parliamentary oversight over the security sector.¹²¹ According to Akrap, committees have the authority to send inquiries to any intelligence agency, thereby ensuring transparency and accountability. Oversight committees have full access to classified information upon request and their scope of work is extensive, acting on media reports and intelligence community reports, including classified annual reports.¹²²

Parliamentary oversight of the intelligence community in Croatia is robust, with the president and prime minister playing roles in nominating intelligence agency directors, subject to a parliamentary screening process. While the parliamentary committee's opinion on these nominations is significant, it is not obligatory.¹²³

As mentioned, parliamentary committees hold the authority to request information from the security sector. However, there is a noted lack of interest among some members in utilising this capability. For instance, while the intelligence agency shares its annual report with the parliament, Kuzmanić observes that few committee members actually read it.¹²⁴ As such, one of the primary obstacle is not accessing information about the security sector, but

rather the reluctance of committee members to exercise their right to obtain and review this information, which limits their oversight role. Highlighting the rapid evolution of security issues, especially when it comes to new technologies, Kuzmanić recommends that NATO and the EU provide more support to parliamentary committees on security matters.¹²⁵

Another significant issue is the lack of resources available to parliamentary committees. Members do not have assistants or advisors to support them, so gaining expertise on security issues depends on the willingness and interest of the individual members. This is particularly concerning as security issues become increasingly complex, necessitating greater investment in understanding the modern security landscape.¹²⁶ Gorana Grgić, senior researcher at the ETH Zürich's Center for Security Studies (CSS), concurs that one major challenge is the insufficient knowledge and expertise among parliamentary oversight bodies to effectively address security sector issues. This gap is compounded by limited time and opportunities to develop necessary skills and understanding.¹²⁷

Moreover, Grgić, argues that political polarisation is a major impediment to parliamentary oversight, which complicates the process of monitoring and evaluating security sector activities. For example, at the moment, there is deep infighting between Croatia's President - Zoran Milanović - and Prime Minister - Andrej Plenković. The head of state and government are also divided on transatlanticism. Milanović has publicly criticised the EU and NATO, contrasting sharply with Plenković's strong pro-EU and pro-NATO stance. This polarisation can hinder consensus-building and impede effective scrutiny.¹²⁸

Despite political differences, committee decisions are typically reached by consensus.¹²⁹ Moreover, according to the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, Croatia maintains the most transparent military budget in the Western Balkans, which includes specific references to procurement projects, underscoring the country's commitment to transparency in its defence spending.¹³⁰

3.4 Kosovo

During the Yugoslav years, Kosovo was one of two autonomous regions located in Serbia. Following the Kosovo war (1998 to 1999), the international community has played a dominant role in its security sector. The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), provided a range of roles normally played by government, including with regards to security. Although the Kosovo Liberation Army was disbanded, and many members joined the newly formed Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC), this had no role either in defence or in internal security; security in Kosovo has instead been provided by the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR).¹³¹

In February 2008, Kosovo declared independence, which makes it the second youngest state in the world. It began a process of transforming the security sector, replacing the KPC with the Kosovo Security Force (KSF). Still, KSF largely performed non-military tasks, including search and rescue operations, explosive ordnance disposal, control and clearance of hazardous materials,

firefighting, and other humanitarian assistance tasks.¹³² By 2018, Kosovo had officially established a Ministry of Defence, and with the support from some NATO member states, KSF's transformation from disaster relief to a traditional defence force started. In line with Kosovo's state formation, it aims to eventually phase out and replace KFOR.¹³³

Today, Kosovo is considered a potential candidate for membership in the EU and it aspires to become a NATO member state. It is arguably the most pro-transatlanticist state in the entire Balkan region. It however faces an almost permanent threat from its neighbour, Serbia, as Belgrade still does not recognise Kosovo's independence.¹³⁴

Given ongoing transformation of Kosovo's security sector, parliamentary oversight remains crucial. For example, proportionally speaking, Kosovo's military budget has significantly increased as a direct result of the KSF's transformation from \$63 million (0.8% of GDP) in 2018 to \$107 million (1.1% of GDP) in 2022.¹³⁵ Proper oversight will help ensure that the increased budget will be spent where intended.

In Kosovo, the army enjoys the trust of an overwhelming 91% of the population, the police are trusted by 89%, while parliament is trusted by just 50% of people.¹³⁶

The most relevant sections of Kosovo's constitution pertaining to security sector governance include:¹³⁷

- Chapter IV on the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo (especially Article 65): grants parliament the power to oversee the work of government, including foreign and security policies, to adopt laws, resolutions and general acts, and to approve the budget;
- Chapter XI on the security sector: focuses on the roles and responsibilities related to the Kosovo Security Force, the Kosovo Security Council, the Kosovo Police, Kosovo Intelligence Agency, and state of emergency.
- Chapter XII on independent institutions: sets out the responsibilities and competencies of the ombudsperson, auditor-general, and other independent agencies.
- Article 77 stipulates that at least one vice chair of each parliamentary committee shall be from the deputies of a community different from the community of the chair.

According to the European Commission, aside from strengthening its legislative functions, Kosovo's parliament needs to enhance its oversight function over the executive power and of independent institutions.¹³⁸

Kosovo has several parliamentary oversight bodies related to the security sector, the most relevant being the Committee on Security and Defence Affairs, Oversight Committee for Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Committee on Foreign Affairs and Diaspora, Committee on European Integration, and the Committee on Human Rights, Gender Equality, Victims of Sexual Violence During the War, and Missing

Persons and Petitions. Together, these parliamentary oversight bodies should play a crucial role in promoting accountability and transparency among security sector institutions, and safeguarding democratic governance in Kosovo. They conduct hearings, inquiries, and investigations to scrutinise the actions and decisions of security sector agencies, providing oversight to protect the rights and interests of Kosovo's citizens.

As mentioned, many of Kosovo's institutions were only recently developed from scratch and individuals who occupy the positions had virtually no comparative perspective on how these institutions should run. Given the newness of Kosovo's institutions, oversight bodies tend to lack a long culture of transparency and accountability.¹³⁹ Consequently, budgets and information tend to be overclassified.¹⁴⁰

Kosovo's Parliamentary Committees

Committee	Scope of work	Members	Female
Committee on Security and Defence Affairs ¹⁴¹	Review draft laws and security strategies; exercise parliamentary control over security sector institutions; oversee implementation of international security standards, gender representation, and human rights in security institutions; oversight of KSF budget and long-term plan; request reports from responsible authorities; oversee security, control, and management of state borders; supervise airspace control; review disciplinary measures and complaints against security force members; review security situation and propose recommendations; engage in oversight of security legislation implementation; and supervise reforms in security institutions.	11	1
Oversight Committee for Kosovo Intelligence Agency ¹⁴²	Ensure legality of the work of the Kosovo Intelligence Agency; review and approve the agency's budget; review reports from the agency director and Inspector General; provide opinions on detailed budget proposals; and seek and investigate information regarding the agency's work.	10	1
Committee on Foreign Affairs and Diaspora ¹⁴³	Build cooperation with state parliaments and promote assembly membership in regional and international parliamentary organisations; follow up on treaty ratification; monitor implementation of foreign affairs laws and diplomatic immunities; monitor government actions in foreign policy and diaspora affairs; cooperate with international counterparts and promote parliamentary diplomacy; and consider draft laws and budget proposals related to foreign affairs.	10	7
Committee on European Integration ¹⁴⁴	Monitor harmonisation of laws with EU legislation; oversee government activities related to EU relations, SAA implementation, and European Reform Agenda; promote parliamentary diplomacy and cooperation with EU institutions and member states; and consider draft laws and budget proposals related to EU integration.	10	5
Committee on Human Rights, Gender Equality, Victims of Sexual Violence During the War, Missing Persons and Petitions ¹⁴⁵	Cooperate with the ombudsperson and international human rights organisations; review gender equality issues and advancement of women; review issues related to missing persons and petitions addressed to the Assembly; and oversee implementation of laws within its scope.	10	9

According to Hisen Berisha, a Kosovar MP, a significant challenge faced by parliamentary oversight bodies in Kosovo is the “limited capacity and expertise among parliamentarians and their staff”.

Of the above committees, two are particularly important with regards to security sector oversight. Firstly, the Committee on Security and Defence Affairs is tasked with an extensive range of responsibilities. It is chaired by an opposition party member, and currently consists of 10 members, including only one female.¹⁴⁶

The Committee is a relatively new body (its predecessor was established in 2019) and a product of the above-mentioned transitions in Kosovo. It has had to focus on many new and practical matters, including a variety of legislation related to oversight of the security sector, such as drafting the Law on the Parliamentary Commissioner for the KSF, which allows the Commissioner to investigate violations of rights of military personnel, demonstrating the evolving nature of oversight structures.¹⁴⁷

Despite these broad responsibilities, the Committee faces challenges due to limited resources.¹⁴⁸ According to Hisen Berisha, a Kosovar MP, a significant challenge faced by parliamentary oversight bodies in Kosovo is the “limited capacity and expertise among parliamentarians and their staff”.¹⁴⁹ He explains that effective oversight of the security sector requires a deep understanding of complex issues such as national security, defence policy, intelligence operations, and military matters. Many members of parliamentary oversight committees may lack the necessary technical knowledge and experience, which hinders their ability to oversee and hold the security sector accountable.

Additionally, Berisha notes that “political influence and partisanship significantly affect the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight in Kosovo”.¹⁵⁰ The security sector often becomes a battleground for political parties, leading to biased or ineffective oversight. Political pressure on oversight bodies can discourage thorough investigation and accountability, especially when it involves high-ranking officials or sensitive issues.

Lulzim Peci, executive director of the Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development, suggest that the Parliamentary Committee on Security and Defence Affairs is overstretched. It therefore either needs to set up a more permanent structure with regular sessions in order to fulfil its tasks more effectively, or a new committee should be established, specifically dedicated to defence affairs.¹⁵¹ If the committee were to be split into two separate bodies – one on security affairs for agencies under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and another on defense affairs for the Ministry of Defence and the Kosovo Security Force – it might improve efficiency and effectiveness as each committee would be able to focus more deeply on specific areas.¹⁵²

Moreover, the budget of the Parliamentary Committee for Security and Defence Affairs is approximately €5,000, which is not enough to cover even basic activities such as field trips, workshops, receptions for foreign delegations and so on. Member also do not have their own offices nor stationary.¹⁵³

The Committee for Security and Defence Affairs is assisted by a Support Unit, which consists of only two civil servants - a coordinator and an officer for professional support – who largely focus on administrative tasks.¹⁵⁴ Experts also suggest that the Committee lacks basic infrastructure and expertise, which limits its ability to adequately fulfil its mandate.¹⁵⁵

Although the Committee for Security and Defence Affairs has not built relations with civil society, external experts, and other government oversight institutions, including the Office of the Auditor General, it has developed a relatively good relationship with the Ministry of Defence. Recently, a KSF Legislative Liaison Officer/ Official to the Kosovo Assembly has placed between the MoD and the Assembly in order to improve relations between the two.

Another important oversight committee in Kosovo is dedicated to the Kosovo Intelligence Agency (KIA). While the legislative framework governing KIA oversight is relatively robust, there are notable discrepancies and challenges regarding its implementation. For instance, the Constitution tasks the Auditor General with auditing public institutions, but the law governing intelligence services allocates that role to the Inspector General of the KIA, who reports to the Prime Minister and the KIA Director. As argued by CESS, this arrangement effectively confines auditing to internal processes, thereby limiting the scope of parliamentary oversight.¹⁵⁶

Vetting procedures for parliamentarians joining oversight committees also seem to be problematic, as the committees depend on the very same structures that they should be monitoring. For example, committee members on the Committee on the Oversight of KIA are vetted by the KIA. The independence of the committees would be strengthened if they were vetted autonomously.¹⁵⁷

Berisha also highlights the “lack of transparency and access to information” as a significant hurdle.¹⁵⁸ Effective parliamentary oversight relies on access to accurate and timely information from the security sector; in Kosovo, this is often limited. Security agencies may withhold information citing national security concerns, leading to information asymmetry that hinders the oversight bodies’ ability to perform their functions. This lack of transparency not only limits the effectiveness of oversight, but also erodes public trust in the security sector and the parliamentary bodies charged with its oversight.

Kosovo faces unique challenges that complicate parliamentary oversight of the security sector. Berisha points out issues such as “UN Resolution 1244 and the KFOR mandate, limitations on Kosovo’s military capacities, reliance on international presence for security, the [European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo] EULEX mandate, and the unmarked and unratified 366 km border with Serbia”.¹⁵⁹ He also notes that the presence of Serbian terrorist and paramilitary organisations, coupled with transnational crimes, threatens the stability and security of the region.

3.5 Montenegro

Montenegro is a NATO member state and an aspiring EU member. It experienced a major political shift in 2023 when President Milo Đukanović from the Democratic Socialist Party (DPS), who has dominated Montenegrin politics for over three decades, lost power after he was defeated by *Europe Now!*, a party which was co-founded by the current president, Jakov Milatović, and prime minister, Miloško Spajić. Milatović has since broken away from *Europe Now!*.

On the one hand, Đukanović was pro-West, but perceived as corrupt. On the other, although Europe Now!'s primary objective is EU membership, the government includes coalition partners that are anti-Western and pro-Russia. One of the ruling party's partners, the 'For the Future of Montenegro alliance', is led by Andrija Mandić, who openly criticises Montenegro's NATO membership and has called for closer ties with Russia and Serbia.¹⁶⁰ Montenegrins from across the political spectrum are worried that Mandić's influence is growing, which also coincides with Serbian and Russian influence over the political process, thereby threatening the country's EU membership path.¹⁶¹

Serbia's influence over Montenegro, exercised through the Serbian Orthodox Church, media networks, and cooperation with local politicians—further bolstered by Russian support—cannot be underestimated. Pro-Russia and anti-NATO narratives are particularly strong in Montenegro, largely fueled by Serbian propaganda, which poses a significant threat to the country's security environment.¹⁶² As Montenegro progresses toward EU membership, it is likely that anti-EU propaganda will intensify, further challenging the country's stability and its efforts to fully integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures.

In Montenegro, 63% of the population trusts the army, 55% trust the police, and only 47% express trust towards parliament.¹⁶³

Issues pertaining to security sector governance in Montenegro are primarily addressed in sections of the Constitution:¹⁶⁴

- Article 82 on competence of the parliament: outlines the powers and responsibilities of parliament, including its authority to oversee the work of the government; adopt laws; proclaim the state of war or emergency; exercise control over state adopt the national security strategy and defence strategy; decide on the use of the Army of Montenegro in international operations; and supervise the army and security services.
- Article 108 and 109 on interpellation and parliamentary investigation: grants members of Parliament the right to initiate fact finding missions or to pose questions to the government and its members, as well as to request interpellations, which are formal inquiries into the government's policies or actions.

Moreover, Montenegro has adopted a special law pertaining to oversight of the security sector, namely the Law on Parliamentary Oversight in the Security and Defence Sector.¹⁶⁵ Collectively, the Constitution together with the special law provide the legal basis for parliamentary oversight in Montenegro, outlining the mechanisms through which the Parliament exercises control over the government and security sector institutions.

The aforementioned law is distinctive as it establishes comprehensive procedures for various types of hearings, ensuring a systematic approach to parliamentary oversight. It mandates regular reporting, thereby promoting accountability and transparency within government operations. Additionally, the law includes provisions that actively engage civil society, enriching the oversight process by incorporating diverse perspectives and expertise. Importantly, it safeguards whistleblowers, fostering

Pro-Russia and anti-NATO narratives are particularly strong in Montenegro, largely fueled by Serbian propaganda, which poses a significant threat to the country's security environment.

an environment where individuals can report unlawful actions without fear of retribution. The inclusion of penal provisions for non-compliance with oversight requests further underscores its commitment to accountability. These elements broaden the scope of oversight, positioning this law as a robust framework for enhancing governmental transparency and responsibility.

In Montenegro, several parliamentary committees should play oversight roles with regards to the security sector, especially the Security and Defence Committee, which is regulated by the special law mentioned above. Such bodies include the Committee on International Relations and Emigrants, Committee on European Integration, and the Committee on Human Rights and Freedoms. These committees are responsible for monitoring and scrutinising various aspects of national security, defence, law enforcement, and intelligence activities. Moreover, ad hoc committees may be established to investigate specific security-related issues or incidents.

Regardless, the European Commission's latest report expressed concern about Montenegro's general lack of parliamentary accountability and government oversight.¹⁶⁶ It also recommended that Montenegro adopt the Act on Parliament that would regulate relations between the executive and the legislative authority. To date, Montenegro still has not implemented the recommendation.¹⁶⁷

Montenegro Parliamentary Committees

Committee	Scope	Members	Female
Security and Defence Committee ¹⁶⁸	Considers proposals for laws, regulations, and acts in security and defence areas; conducts parliamentary control of the police, National Security Agency, and other security bodies and services; considers nominations for head of police and director of National Security Agency; and issues opinions on the appointment of managing staff for military intelligence and security operations.	13	3
Committee on International Relations and Emigrants ¹⁶⁹	Considers issues related to foreign policy and international relations; proposes platforms for talks with foreign delegations and considers reports on international visits; and issues opinions on appointment and recall of candidates for ambassadors and heads of diplomatic missions.	13	4
Committee on European Integration ¹⁷⁰	Monitors accession negotiations with the EU and oversees negotiation process and provides opinions and guidelines on negotiation positions.	13	5
Committee on Human Rights and Freedoms ¹⁷¹	Considers proposals for laws and regulations related to human rights; monitors exercise of documents and activities for improving national, ethnic, and other equality; and cooperates with relevant bodies to harmonise legislation with European standards.	13	3

The Security and Defence Committee in Montenegro is responsible for a broad range of activities aimed at maintaining and enhancing the security and defence of the country and its citizens (outlined in the table). It has never been chaired by a member of the opposition.¹⁷² To compliment the committee's work, Montenegro has a Council for Civilian Oversight fo Police Work, which serves as a mechanism for overseeing police activities and promoting accountability.¹⁷³ Particularly, the Council may receive citizens' complaints regarding cases of police abuse, and may make recommendations to the chief of police and interior minister.

Nonetheless, according to Nikoleta Pavićević and Dragana Jaćimović from the Institut Alternativa, the Committee is not always delivering on all the tasks that are assigned to it. For example, the Committee has consistently failed to consider annual reports on a variety of issues related to the security sector. Some of the annual reports may not be as pertinent compared to others, but still, when the Committee fails for example to regularly consider reports on secret surveillance measures that temporarily limit constitutional rights and freedoms, it negates its oversight functions. There have been instances where requests by the Committee to the security sector have not been submitted; parliamentarians, in turn, did not follow-up with the security sector on their requests.¹⁷⁴

As for its role in considering strategic documents pertaining to security and defence, experts note that the Committee remains "completely inactive".¹⁷⁵ The Committee also did not consider a recent Law on Internal Affairs, which is a pertinent piece of legislation relating directly to its primary competencies. Perhaps failure to effectively perform this task relates to the Security and Defence Committee of Montenegro's wide range of responsibilities. As recommended in the context of Kosovo, it might improve efficiency and effectiveness to split this into two separate committees with one focused on internal security and the other on defence.

A security committee could focus on parliamentary control over the police, National Security Agency, and other security bodies. This committee would handle issues related to law enforcement, human rights within the security sector, and oversight of police operations. A defence committee could concentrate on matters related to the Ministry of Defence, military intelligence, counterintelligence, and security operations. This committee would review defence policies, budgets, and strategic plans, ensuring alignment with NATO and EU standards.

It is also worth noting that there have also been quite a few instances during which government failed to adhere to protocol with regards to the appointment of individuals who need the Committees approval prior to assuming certain security sector positions, thereby undermining the role of parliament's oversight function. Furthermore, spot visits to security sector institutions are relatively rare, even though such field trips could reveal important information to the Committee.¹⁷⁶

As such, Montenegro still needs to develop a culture where oversight is seen as an important parliamentary role, and not merely a rubber stamp activity. The fact that the work plan for many years has by and large been a boilerplate document, also shows that the Committee has not evolved a lot in terms of how it operates.

Montenegro still needs to develop a culture where oversight is seen as an important parliamentary role, and not merely a rubber stamp activity.

According to Nikola Zirojević, member of the Security and Defence Committee, the parliamentary majority often controls proceedings, manipulating rules and halting hearings that could be politically damaging.¹⁷⁷

For instance, the chair of the Committee, who wields significant power over the agenda, is from the ruling party. In Montenegro, the chair is supposed to come from the opposition; in practice this has been blocked by the ruling party. The opposition's representative, serving as deputy chair, holds minimal authority – they can only step in when the chair is absent and lack the power to call committee sessions. This undermines the opposition's ability to perform effective oversight, which is crucial for democracy.

Another member of the Committee, Jevrosima Pejović, notes that opposition requests for hearings often go unanswered.¹⁷⁸ Recently, for example, Montenegro's Interior Minister, Danilo Saranovic, and Prime Minister Spajic were engaged in a public spat over the appointment of the police chief.¹⁷⁹ When opposition members requested a hearing about the matter, given the high coverage in the media, a hearing was finally scheduled. However, it has been delayed for months, making it impossible for MPs to perform their oversight duties effectively.

Another case in point is the dismissal of the head of the Police Directorate, Zoran Brđanin, after the Committee did not adopt his police report for 2022.¹⁸⁰ Despite the rejection of his report, the court reinstated Brđanin, ruling that if the committee does not provide an opinion on reports within 20 days, they are automatically deemed approved. This ruling represents a significant setback, effectively neutralising the committee's oversight authority. It compels the committee to hastily review reports within the 20-day window, which undermines the quality of oversight. Additionally, if the chair fails to convene the committee within that timeframe, the reports are automatically approved, further weakening the committee's ability to provide meaningful scrutiny. This situation highlights the need for procedural reforms to ensure the committee can function effectively and avoid being undermined by bureaucratic loopholes.

Pejović describes the relationship between parliament and the security sector in Montenegro as problematic, with the government often avoiding tough conversations and seemingly hiding information. She also cites an instance where a Committee hearing led to the expulsion of the Minister of Justice, Andrej Milović, from his party - yet he retained his government position.¹⁸¹

Moreover, Pejović expresses concern that the main political players prioritise their political careers over the reforms needed for European integration, with the Europe Now! movement deviating from EU integration promises despite its name, and Belgrade exerting strong influence in Podgorica. This division within the government and the influence of external actors hinder effective parliamentary oversight and decision-making.

Pejović goes on to highlight the limited resources and expertise available to parliamentary committees for conducting their oversight activities. Many MPs lack expertise in security matters and do not fully grasp the importance of the security sector for the country. The Committees has a few professional employees who

assist, but there is a lack of staffs and resources for research or expert advice at the party level. Political parties do not invest adequately in knowledge and data related to security, leading to a need for more education and training, especially for new parliamentarians. Pejović suggests that NATO could provide more support and tailored guidance to help parliamentarians effectively oversee the security sector, emphasising the importance of continuous education and training in this field.

3.6 North Macedonia

The mass protests in 2016 marked a watershed moment in North Macedonia's recent history. The protests were against the incumbent President Gjorge Ivanov and the government led by the interim Prime Minister Emil Dimitriev from the ruling Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) party.

In 2015, information came to light showing that the North Macedonia's intelligence agency was involved in a highly politicised wire-tapping scandal, allegedly surveiling over 20,000 people.¹⁸² Protests started after the controversial decision by Ivanov to stop the investigation of former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and dozens of politicians who were allegedly involved in the scandal. Later on, a court established that the secret police wiretapped over 4,200 phones without obtaining court orders.¹⁸³

To break away from the state capturing of institutions of the 2010s, North Macedonia embarked on a process of legal reforms, which also included new legislation governing the security sector. Overall, the SSR process shifted from a state-centric approach to one that protects the individual from human right violations and abuse of power. To a large extent, North Macedonia has made excellent progress on the security sector governance front as a direct result of EU conditionality and support.¹⁸⁴

At the same time, North Macedonia remains politically and ethnically divided and ruling elites have been reluctant to strengthen accountability.¹⁸⁵ In North Macedonia, 60% of the population trusts the army, while only 47% and 23% trust police and parliament respectively.¹⁸⁶

In North Macedonia's Constitution, the sections most relevant to security sector governance include:¹⁸⁷

- Section III on the organisation of state authority: outlines the functions, powers, and procedures of the country's parliament. Key provisions relevant to parliamentary oversight of the security sector may include:
 - Article 68: pertains to the oversight role of the Assembly, including its authority to adopt laws and oversee the activities of the executive branch, including security and defence agencies. The Assembly is also responsible for approving budgets, making decisions with regards to war and peace, and ratifying international treaties.

- Article 76: specifies the establishment and functioning of permanent and temporary working bodies on matters of public interest. These bodies are empowered to play a crucial role in scrutinising the policies and activities of government, which could also include the security sector.
- Article 92: although primarily focused on the executive branch, this article includes provisions related to the government's obligation to report and be accountable to the parliament.

The European Commission's latest report on North Macedonia noted that while parliamentary oversight is generally exercised on a regular basis, it needs to be strengthened, particularly when it comes to the intelligence services.¹⁸⁸ The Commission specifically recommends amending the rules of procedure to enhance parliamentary oversight.

According to Dragan Kovachki, member of three security sector-related committees, parliamentary oversight is a crucial aspect of democratic governance in North Macedonia. The legal framework supporting this oversight is robust, with the parliament established as the supreme legislative body overseeing the military and police.¹⁸⁹ Two relatively new laws also enhance the power of the legislature to conduct oversight over the security sector: the Law on Interception of Communications and the Law on the National Security Agency (ANB), which were adopted in 2018 and 2019, respectively.¹⁹⁰ The former spells out that the new Operational Technical Agency (OTA), responsible for managing technical equipment and infrastructure related to communications, is accountable to parliament rather than political agencies, while the ANB aimed to de-politicise and modernise North Macedonia's intelligence services.

In North Macedonia, parliamentary oversight of the security sector is primarily conducted through several committees within the Assembly (Sobranie), each with specific responsibilities related to security and defence, set out in the table below.

While parliamentary oversight is generally exercised on a regular basis, it needs to be strengthened, particularly when it comes to the intelligence services.

North Macedonia Parliamentary Committees

Committee	Scope	Members (including deputies)	Female
Committee on Defence and Security ¹⁹¹	Oversight of defence and security matters; cooperation with international security and defence systems; and protection of citizens' rights and property.	26	6
Committee for Supervision over the Work of National Security Agency (NSA) and Intelligence ¹⁹²	Monitoring of the National Security Agency and the Intelligence Agency's compliance with citizens' rights and freedoms; and evaluation of agency operations.	18	2
Committee on Oversight of the Implementation of Measures for Interception of Communications ¹⁹³	Oversight of communication monitoring measures' legality and effectiveness; preparation of annual reports; and international cooperation.	10	0
Committee on Foreign Policy and Foreign Trade ¹⁹⁴	Formulation and evaluation of foreign policy strategies; ratification of international agreements; and parliamentary cooperation with other states.	26	3
Standing Committee of Inquiry for Protection of Civil Freedoms and Rights ¹⁹⁵	Protection of citizens' freedoms and rights; monitoring of laws and regulations; and cooperation with international bodies.	29	10
Committee on European Affairs ¹⁹⁶	Monitoring of EU integration processes; harmonisation of legislation with EU standards; and information dissemination on EU affairs.	30	14

Parliamentarians often lack expertise in traditional areas related to the security sector, which hampers their ability to ask pertinent questions and fully understand agency operations.

According to Antonio Milošoski, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and current member of the Defence and Security Committee, reforms have led to a stronger relationship between parliamentary committees and the security sector. The latter institutions are generally more transparent than they used to be, even with regards to the opposition. Kovachki similarly notes that while agencies are relatively responsive to parliamentary requests for information - and are obliged to provide annual reports - there are instances where they fall short of legal standards. For instance, the Agency for National Security was publicly criticised by the committee for failing to comply with legal standards, leading to the eventual removal of its head.¹⁹⁷

However, significant challenges hinder effective parliamentary oversight. One Macedonian expert highlights the lack of competence of parliamentarians and their limited engagement in real oversight activities. She also points out that sometimes even parliamentarians have "questionable security backgrounds".¹⁹⁸

Kovachki also identified several significant challenges hindering effective parliamentary oversight. Notably parliamentarians often lack expertise in traditional areas related to the security sector, which hampers their ability to ask pertinent questions and fully understand agency operations.¹⁹⁹ For example, in terms of budgets, both the Committee on Defence and Security as well as the Intelligence Committee have the ability to oversee

security sector budgets. However, as argued by Teodora Fuior and Vlado Gjerdovski, a lack of expertise and interest in overseeing spending largely limits their role to decorative functions.²⁰⁰ This is exacerbated by the rise of advanced technology, which has created the need for additional knowledge and expertise; this is not currently fulfilled by parliamentarians.²⁰¹

In terms of staffing, the above three committees have a joint secretariat which consists of support staff of approximately three staffers, each with a security clearance and the ability to take part in committee activities. It provides for developing institutional expertise and institutional memory.²⁰² On the other hand, the same agency that provides staffers with security clearances also has the authority to revoke them. As such, to ensure job security, staffers may be loyal to the agencies rather than the parliamentary committees.²⁰³

Political interference and partisan interests impact oversight effectiveness, as seen in the delay or avoidance of sensitive hearings. Additionally, the process of obtaining security clearances is fraught with challenges, likely linked to political influence. Some parliamentarians have faced significant delays in receiving clearances, which has restricted their ability to access vital information, thereby undermining their oversight role.²⁰⁴

Moreover, according to CESS, North Macedonia continues to lack an institutional culture of accountability and transparency. Information about the security sector and its budgets are overclassified, which in turn, opens up the opportunity for misuse of resources, especially with regards to intelligence.²⁰⁵

To complement the oversight committees, North Macedonia implemented a Citizens Supervision Council as part of its reforms. It is charged with overseeing the new Operational Technical Agency (OTA), which monitors communications, including phone calls, emails, text messages, and other forms of digital or telecommunication.²⁰⁶ OTA's predecessor played an important role in the wire-tapping scandal that haunted North Macedonia, which reinforces the importance of adding layers of oversight, especially civilian oversight.

The Citizens Supervision Council should be composed of 7 citizens elected by the Assembly.²⁰⁷ Among other things, the Council has the power to receive complaints from the public, initiate investigations regarding the interception of communication, and even to request the Committee on Oversight of the Implementation of Measures for Interception of Communications to conduct a parliamentary investigation. However, the Citizens Supervision Council is still not operating. Some experts suggest that it is due to legal ambiguity regarding its role, thereby necessitating legislation to make the body functional.

Furthermore, North Macedonia recently amended its criminal law to reduce sentences for abuse of office and involvement in a criminal enterprise. Consequently, cases against key officials involved with the wiretapping scandal had been discontinued and those who abused the intelligence services face no accountability of their actions.²⁰⁸

Despite the shortcomings, North Macedonia has on average made a relatively impressive security sector governance transitions in a short space of time. DCAF has played a crucial role in supporting North Macedonia's oversight of the security sector, ranging from expert support on legislative reforms to providing approximately 30 capacity building events in a space of 3 years.²⁰⁹

3.7 Serbia

Under President Aleksandar Vučić's regime, Serbia has embarked on a major security sector transformation, including rapid modernisation of military equipment, momentous investments in advanced weaponry, the re-introduction of military conscription, and a significant expansion of its special forces, signalling a desire to shift towards more offensive capabilities.²¹⁰ The military budget nearly doubled between 2018 and 2022, from \$817 million (1.6% of GDP) to \$1.43 billion (2.3% of GDP).²¹¹ Last year, Serbia, the only country in the Western Balkans that does not aspire to be a NATO member, was also the sole country in the region that spent as much as 2% of its GDP on the military.²¹²

Serbia under Vučić has been increasingly characterised by rising authoritarianism. The authors of *Beyond Stabilitocracy* argue "Serbia can no longer be described as a democratic country, but is at best a competitive authoritarian regime".²¹³

The further the Vučić regime moves down the autocratic path, there more rapidly one can expect oversight over the security sector will be reversed, as the security sector is likely to play a firmer role in keeping the regime in power. According to the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the December 2023 Parliamentary election was marred with irregularities, including voter intimidation and harassment of both civil society activities and journalists.²¹⁴

Moreover, the Vučić regime has also increased domestic surveillance by for example installing more than 8,000 surveillance cameras, largely from China, with high-tech facial recognition capabilities in city-centres across Serbia. Some analysts are concerned that Serbia will use this technology to monitor regime opponents and journalists.²¹⁵

Officially, Serbia still aspires to be an EU member. In practice, it seems the Vučić regime is more interested in the economic benefits that Serbia can accrue on the path to EU membership, as opposed to subscribing to values related to accountability, rule of a law, and certain human rights that are intertwined with being part of the EU.

In addition to promoting stronger relations with China and Russia, Serbian propaganda also frequently advocates the concept of 'Srpski svet' (Serbian world), which advocates that all Serbs should be united in one territory. Serbia's Deputy Prime Minister, Aleksandar Vulin, one of the foremost supporters of Serbian world, recently stated that "It's a duty of my generation to unite all Serbs. This process has already started [and] will not stop. Sanctions are a small price to pay".²¹⁶ This rhetoric, along with the Vučić regime's regional ambitions, raises concerns about stability in the Western

Serbia under Vučić has been increasingly characterised by rising authoritarianism.

Balkans, particularly as it aligns with nationalist ideologies and undermines efforts at regional cooperation.

In Serbia, 80% of the population places their trust in the army, 66% trust the police, and only 43% harbor trust towards parliament. The contrast between the high trust in the security sector and the distrust in parliament is striking.²¹⁷

Several sections of the Serbian Constitution are particularly relevant to security sector governance, including:²¹⁸

- Article 99; addresses the National Assembly's role in supervising the work of ministers, which also includes those related to security sector. It also provides the Assembly with the power to supervise the work of security services, to decide on war and peace, and to declare a state of emergency.
- Article 105; outlines the powers and functions of the National Assembly, including its role in overseeing the work of the Government and state administration.
- Article 141; stipulates that the army of Serbia is subject to democratic and civil control.
- Article 200; outlines the procedure for the National Assembly to declare a state of war or emergency, which involves parliamentary oversight and approval.

Interestingly, although Article 97 says that the Serbian state shall provide security, the words 'police' and 'intelligence services' are conspicuously absent. In the context of rising authoritarianism, the lack of defined roles for the security sector in the highest law of the land makes for a weak constitution.

The European Commission's 2023 Report also expressed concern that oversight of the executive in Serbia is "weak".²¹⁹ Parliamentary oversight over the security sector is primarily conducted through various parliamentary committees, as well as through the National Assembly as a whole. The most relevant ones include the Committee on Defence and Internal Affairs, the Committee on Security Services Control, Committee on the Judiciary, Public Administration, and Local Self-Government, Committee on European Integration, and the National Assembly's Collegium. Through their work, they are mandated to contribute to ensuring accountability, transparency, and effectiveness in the security sector in Serbia.

Serbia's Parliamentary Committees

Committee	Scope	Members	Female
Committee on Defence and Internal Affairs ²²⁰	Responsible for overseeing matters related to national defence, military affairs, and internal security; reviews legislation, budgets, and policies related to the Ministry of Defence, the Army of Serbia, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs; and ensures that the country's defence and security policies align with national interests and international obligations.	33	7
Security Services Control Board ²²¹	Monitors and oversees the activities of Serbia's security and intelligence services; ensures that these services operate within the bounds of the law, protect human rights, and maintain oversight to prevent abuse; reviews reports, audits, and investigates allegations of misconduct or violations by security agencies.	16	3
Committee on Foreign Affairs ²²²	Responsible for issues related to Serbia's international relations, foreign policy, and diplomacy; reviews and debates legislation, treaties, and agreements affecting Serbia's foreign policy; plays a role in shaping Serbia's position on global issues and ensuring that foreign policies align with national interests.	34	17
Committee for Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality ²²³	Focuses on issues related to human rights, minority rights, and gender equality; works on legislation and policies aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of various groups, including ethnic minorities, women, and marginalised communities; addresses issues related to discrimination, equality, and social justice.	32	13
Committee for European Integration ²²⁴	Deals with Serbia's process of joining the European Union and aligning its policies with EU standards; oversees the implementation of EU-related reforms, negotiations, and compliance with EU requirements; plays a crucial role in coordinating Serbia's integration efforts and ensuring that legislative changes support the accession process.	33	17

Unlike all the other Western Balkan states, Serbia's parliamentary website does not spell out the functions of each committee. Nonetheless, it lists the names of committee members and their party affiliations.

Marija Ignjatijević from the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP) recently noted that the Committee on Defence and Internal Affairs (DIAC) "has become completely passive over the last decade. Its role has come down to formally discussing quarterly reports of the Ministry of Interior and stamping laws and international agreements".²²⁵ In large part, DIAC has been reduced to a committee back patting the work of the president, government, and SNS.

As for the Security Services Board, which monitors Serbia's secret and intelligence services, consists of 16 members and only three members are female.²²⁶ The chairperson hails from Vučić's party, while the deputy chair is from the Socialist Party of Serbia, which is a coalition partner of the ruling party.

Beyond what the composition of the above parliamentary oversight committees says about government's seriousness

Milan Urošević, a Serbian member of parliament and the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO), says that “bodies within the parliament that are supposed to oversee the security sector do not have real power or access to credible information”.

about promoting accountability, Serbia lacks a genuine culture of parliamentary oversight over the security sector. Goran Svilanović, former Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavia (2000 to 2004) and Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (2013 to 2018), highlights that parliamentary oversight of the security sector in Serbia is largely ineffective and superficial.²²⁷ He notes that MPs often lack a genuine understanding of oversight mechanisms and rely on watered-down information.

Svilanović further describes Serbia’s oversight process as a mere formality with minimal real debate or scrutiny regarding the security services. During his time as Minister of Foreign Affairs, even high-ranking officials have had limited influence over the security sector. This lack of effective oversight is compounded by a general absence of rigorous discussion or evaluation of security policies within the parliament.

In Serbia, the practice of overclassifying information persists, especially with regards to procurement. The European Commission recently recommended that Serbia should adopt a law on access to state security files in order to facilitate transparency.²²⁸ According to Marija Ignjatijević, it is possible for members of parliament to obtain a certificate from the Office of the National Security Council to access classified information – however, in practice, only a small number of them are actually granted this certificate.²²⁹ This is a serious issue, especially in the context of a rapidly expanding security sector coinciding with rising authoritarianism.

Similarly, Milan Urošević, a Serbian member of parliament and the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO), says that “bodies within the parliament that are supposed to oversee the security sector do not have real power or access to credible information”.²³⁰ One of Urošević’s criticisms focuses on the composition of oversight bodies. He argues that “the selection of individuals who make up [parliamentary oversight] bodies is often highly questionable, resembling a closed circle. Often, these are individuals who were previously part of the security sector or are informally connected to it, thus real control does not exist”.²³¹

One of the significant challenges identified by Goran Svilanović is the increasing influence of the security sector, exacerbated by geopolitical events such as the February 2022 escalation of the Russia-Ukraine war. In this context, the security sector in Serbia has gained more power and resources, partly due to increased demand for ammunition and arms exports.²³²

Additionally, there is a noted absence of bipartisan efforts or effective collaboration among political actors to address these challenges, underscoring the need for civil society organisations to foster a more cohesive and informed approach to oversight.²³³

Svilanović further criticises the current state of resources available for parliamentary oversight. While there has been some progress in increasing the number of staffers and enhancing their professionalism through international support, MPs still face limitations. Many MPs, despite long tenures and experience, lack the necessary resources and expertise to effectively oversee the security sector.²³⁴

According to Milan Urošević, reforms or initiatives to strengthen parliamentary oversight of the security sector have failed because the lack of genuine political will. He opines that “there is no real parliamentary oversight over the security sector; instead, there is only an illusion of oversight”.²³⁵

The country’s parliament has also largely been captured by the ruling party – SNS – which increasingly treats state institutions as party institutions. Despite the fact that Serbia does not even rank as one of the top 20 most populous states in Europe, with a population of merely 7 million, SNS is the largest political party in Europe in terms of absolute numbers.²³⁶ The extent of SNS control stifles the ability to hold government accountable.

During 2016, SNS ignored over 40 proposals to form inquiry committees, including ones related to the security sector, such as the notorious Savamala case.²³⁷ Following a deal brokered between UAE and Vučić to construct the Belgrade Waterfront in Savamala, approximately 30 masked men bulldozed and damaged private properties in the same spot earmarked for the Waterfront. Police ignored multiple calls by residents who were under attack.²³⁸

Moreover, there are allegedly worrying links between the Serbian state officials, including the president, the police, and organised crime syndicates.²³⁹ These cases tend not to be discussed in the parliamentary oversight committees.²⁴⁰

Urošević notes that rather than a break with the past, there is a lot of continuity; “[t]his [pattern] is particularly evident given the lack of discontinuity with the security sector from the communist regime and Slobodan Milošević’s era”.²⁴¹ He further stresses that important reforms to strengthen parliamentary oversight of the security sector would require the opening of classified files about the past: “[a]s a fundamental prerequisite for all future steps, it is essential to open the secret files of the communist security services and the security services of Slobodan Milošević, which were involved in state terrorism, killing journalists and political opponents, and several assassination attempts”.²⁴²

Another issue in Serbia has to do with the lack of public and media support for parliamentary scrutiny of the security sector. Urošević stresses that “[e]ven when there have been attempts to make changes, there hasn’t been sufficient public support, primarily because mainstream media, also part of the closed circle, have not communicated the importance of this issue to the public”.²⁴³

Finally, Serbia’s committees lack joint sessions between security committees and the European Integration Committee - although, this seems to be the trend in the region.²⁴⁴ Nonetheless, if Serbia is serious about EU integration, it would make sense to have frequent session between for example DIAC and the European Integration Committee as that would help the two bodies to provide feedback and input into developing laws that would help to facilitate alignment with the EU acquis.

4. Main findings and policy recommendations

The true test of these parliamentary oversight systems will be their performance under duress, particularly in the face of rising authoritarianism, potential conflicts, and persistent societal challenges.

Constitutionally speaking, states across the Western Balkans have legal frameworks that are intended to provide parliamentary oversight of the security sector and protect both the individual and the sovereignty of the state. Despite progress across the Western Balkans in enhancing oversight mechanisms and enacting reforms, significant challenges persist. Political influence, limited capacity, and issues with transparency continue to hinder effective oversight. Strengthening the integrity of oversight mechanisms is crucial to preventing further erosion and ensuring that they can perform their intended functions.

Key challenges facing the Western Balkans, though varying in scope and intensity across different states, include:

- **Rising authoritarianism:** the encroachment of authoritarianism and illiberal democracy poses significant threats to human security and undermines the institutions tasked with oversight. As political environments become more repressive, the institutions meant to ensure accountability may be increasingly compromised.
- **Politicisation of oversight:** there is a growing risk that oversight mechanisms will become politicised and diluted, diminishing their capacity to function effectively. The infiltration of partisan interests can erode the integrity of these bodies, reducing their ability to hold the security sector accountable.
- **Opposition and gender representation:** in some Balkan states, oversight committees are chaired by members of the ruling party, which dilutes parliament's ability to provide checks and balances on the government. Additionally, across the region, women are grossly underrepresented in traditional security committees, both in terms of leadership positions such as committee chairs and as an overall percentage of committee members. Gender-responsive oversight is essential for promoting inclusive, needs-based security policies and strengthening the overall effectiveness of the security sector.
- **Oversight culture:** a pervasive lack of genuine oversight culture weakens the oversight process. Additionally, historic lack of trust and the denial of past atrocities contribute to a climate where effective scrutiny is increasingly difficult.
- **Technical skills:** with the advance of AI and other technologies, the increasing complexity of security sector oversight necessitates advanced technical knowledge and skills.
- **Security certificates:** clearance of staff and committee members is usually performed by the same bodies they oversee, creating a conflict of interest.

Former Constitutional Court judge Albie Sachs's insightful observation, "[i]t is easy to have beautiful principles when they aren't being tested, but isn't it when they are tested that they really matter?" highlights the importance of vigilance. The true test of these parliamentary oversight systems will be their performance under duress, particularly in the face of rising authoritarianism, potential conflicts, and persistent societal challenges. Ensuring that oversight mechanisms develop into robust, transparent, and accountable bodies is essential for upholding and expanding democratic governance within the security sector across the Western Balkans.

5. Policy recommendations for strengthening parliamentary oversight in the Western Balkans

While much has been done to train parliamentarians and oversight committee members on security sector issues, it's crucial to expand and adapt these programs to cover emerging challenges, such as cybersecurity, hybrid threats, and artificial intelligence.

Liberal democracy in the Western Balkans – as anywhere else – is not static; it requires constant vigilance, sustained effort, and adaptive reforms to safeguard its principles. Reinforcing and expanding upon previous achievements is vital to maintain and accelerate democratic gains in a region where backsliding remains a persistent risk.

5.1 Recommendations for Western Balkans states

Enhance institutional integrity and independence

- **Strengthen legal frameworks:** revise and clarify legislative frameworks to explicitly define the roles, powers, and procedures of oversight committees. Ensure that these frameworks safeguard against politicisation and interference.
- **Reinforce committee autonomy:** Implement robust measures to protect the independence of oversight committees from political influence. Empower committees to conduct investigations and access critical information without obstruction.

Address authoritarianism and politicisation

- **Promote transparency:** increase transparency in the workings of oversight committees and security sector institutions through regular public reporting and engagement with stakeholders.
- **Build robust checks and balances:** develop and enforce a system of checks and balances that includes independent auditing bodies to review security sector operations and financial management.

Build capacity and expertise

- **Leverage established reforms and expertise:** given the considerable groundwork laid over the past two decades by organisations like DCAF and the OSCE, future efforts should focus on enhancing the quality and effectiveness of existing systems. This means refining oversight mechanisms, rather than reinventing them, and ensuring their sustainability through continuous professional development and institutional learning.
- **Enhance targeted training programs:** while much has been done to train parliamentarians and oversight committee members on security sector issues, it is crucial to expand and adapt these programs to cover emerging challenges, such as cybersecurity, hybrid threats, and artificial intelligence. Regional partnerships with the EU, OSCE, NATO, and other international organisations should focus on providing advanced, issue-specific training that builds on the knowledge already gained.
- **Strengthen institutional memory and expertise:** one of the key challenges is maintaining continuity in expertise within parliamentary oversight bodies, especially in the face of political turnover. To address this, states should invest in developing permanent expert staff within parliaments, creating a repository

of knowledge that is accessible regardless of political changes. These experts should be equipped with the latest tools and methodologies to provide high-quality analysis and oversight.

- **Foster peer-to-peer learning:** encourage parliamentarians and staff from the Western Balkans to engage in peer exchanges and best-practice sharing with counterparts in the regions. This should include partnerships with countries that have successfully implemented robust security sector oversight, allowing the region to benefit from lessons learned elsewhere while tailoring solutions to local contexts.
- **Develop expert staff:** establish dedicated expert staff within parliament to support oversight functions. Staff should be equipped with the necessary knowledge and tools to conduct thorough reviews and investigations.

Promote inclusivity and representation

- **Enhance diversity in committees:** ensure that oversight committees are inclusive and representative of the population, including by increasing the female representation and introducing more diverse political perspectives.
- **Mandate opposition leadership in oversight committees:** assign leadership roles to opposition members in oversight committees to ensure balanced scrutiny and accountability.

Promote accountability and independent vetting

- **Audit and evaluation:** regularly audit and evaluate the performance of oversight bodies and the implementation of their recommendations to ensure continuous improvement.
- **Ensure independent vetting:** establish independent vetting mechanisms for oversight staff to ensure integrity and prevent conflicts of interest.
- **Promote civilian oversight:** create or strengthen civilian oversight bodies, ensuring they are supported by adequate resources and staffed by individuals elected by opposition parties to maintain consistency in oversight.

Build trust by addressing historical issues and transitional justice

- **Implement transitional justice:** develop and support transitional justice initiatives to address historical abuses and foster reconciliation. Open classified files related to past regimes to build public trust and accountability.
- **Bridge the past and present:** use historical insights to inform current oversight practices and strengthen democratic governance.

Promote regular collaboration and monitoring

- **Facilitate joint sessions:** encourage regular joint sessions between those parliamentary committees focused on security and those handling EU integration. These sessions should focus on aligning national legislation with EU *acquis* and preparing for integration.

5.2 Recommendations for the EU, and NATO in support of parliamentary oversight in the Western Balkans

Support institutional capacity building

- **Collaborate with DCAF and like-minded organisations:** support DCAF's work and other organisations that promote security sector governance and reform in the Balkans.
- **Provide technical assistance:** offer technical support and expertise to bolster the capacity of Western Balkan states' oversight mechanisms, including specialised training programs and resources.

Encourage political will and reform

- **Develop a regional strategy that looks at the Balkans as a whole:** formulate a coordinated strategy among the US, EU, and UK to address regional challenges, recognising that policy decisions in one country can have broader implications for the Balkans.
- **Advocate for reform:** use diplomatic and economic muscle to influence and encourage Western Balkan states to prioritise and implement reforms that strengthen parliamentary oversight and reduce politicisation.

Promote transparency and accountability

- **Enhance EU progress reports:** ensure that the European Commission's progress reports for aspiring EU members include specific monitoring and reporting on democratic oversight of the security sector.
- **Support transparency initiatives:** encourage and support initiatives that increase transparency in security sector operations and oversight processes.

Foster regional cooperation on parliamentary oversight

- **Deepen regional dialogue:** continue to enhance dialogue among Western Balkan states to exchange best practices and address persistent challenges in security sector oversight.
- **Advance joint initiatives:** expand support for regional initiatives that promote collaborative approaches to oversight and address cross-border security issues.

Strengthen public and civil society engagement

- **Support civil society monitoring:** provide funding and support to civil society organisations that monitor parliamentary oversight of the security sector and advocate for reforms.
- **Raise public awareness:** promote efforts to raise public awareness about the importance of effective oversight and transparency in the security sector.

Assist in transitional justice processes

- **Support transitional justice programs:** help Western Balkan states implement transitional justice programs to address past abuses and promote reconciliation.
- **Facilitate historical research:** support research and documentation of past injustices by the security sector to inform current oversight practices and build public trust.

Enhance training and resources

- **Build on existing expert staff:** allocate resources to develop a strong expert staff within parliaments for effective oversight. This includes providing technical and expert support to parliamentarians.
- **Expand training workshops:** facilitate greater training and awareness workshops for parliamentary committees to emphasise their role in oversight and foster a culture of responsibility and accountability.

Address autocratic threats

- **Counter autocratic tendencies:** support efforts to combat the rise of autocratic regimes in the Balkans. Prioritise long-term democratic stability over short-term stability and appeasement of authoritarian leaders.
- **Monitor treaty adherence:** monitor compliance with international treaties protecting individual and group rights, especially as conflicts and political tensions escalate.

By implementing these recommendations, Western Balkan states could strengthen their parliamentary oversight of the security sector, while the EU and NATO can provide crucial support to ensure these efforts are effective and aligned with democratic governance standards.

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