

# Less 'Bang' for the Buck

## STOCKPILE MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE

Most countries in South-east Europe (SEE) face the challenge of managing operational, excess, and ageing weapons and ammunition. Managing ammunition, in particular, requires a comprehensive approach—a mix of complex and often expensive measures relating to planning, procurement, storage, use, infrastructure, physical security, surveillance, and final disposal. Few SEE governments have the capacity to address each of these issues throughout the national ammunition stockpile's life cycle.

Proper management of conventional ammunition and explosives stockpiles involves procedures that increase safety and security at storage sites, thereby enhancing the military's operational capabilities, reducing the risk of unplanned explosions, and preventing illicit proliferation. Yet examples of catastrophic accidents associated with surplus—and sometimes unsafe—ammunition, generally illustrate that SEE governments regard surplus stockpiles as having a high commercial value (if sold) and are reluctant to allocate the budgets required for demilitarization.

The creation of weapons and ammunition surpluses is normal, yet in some countries of the region it presents a continuing problem because the disposal process can be politically sensitive. The Regional Approach to Stockpile Reduction (RASR) initiative aims at fostering regional solutions to South-east Europe's stockpile management problem. RASR participating states are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia. Funded exclusively by the US government, the initiative seeks to address stockpile management challenges by sharing good practices and lessons learned, by building transparency and mutual confidence between RASR participating states, and by pooling transport and destruction capacities.

**In some SEE states, the surplus disposal process can be politically sensitive.**

RASR initiative workshop discussions have revealed disparities and shortfalls in expertise across SEE, specifically in the areas of stockpile safety and security. Technical knowledge and experience are often lost with the restructuring of armed forces and the consequent reassignment or loss of personnel, which thwarts sustainable capacity building. Critically, many soldiers assigned to guard duty at ammunition and weapons storage sites lack the basic training necessary for ensuring the adequate safety and security of these sites.

**RASR workshop discussions have revealed disparities and shortfalls in stockpile management expertise across SEE.**

This chapter reviews the surplus stockpile situation in the nine RASR participating states at the end of 2014, more than five years after the launch of RASR in May 2009.

More generally, the research seeks to identify the most promising means of building on the stockpile management and destruction efforts already undertaken in these countries. The chapter thus highlights the issue of *sustainability*, while placing a particular emphasis on *capacity building* and *training*.



Empty ammunition crates litter the road leading to the site of an unplanned explosion at an ammunition factory in Gorni Lom, Bulgaria. October 2014. © AP Photo



A participant is trained in firefighting skills during an ammunition transportation safety course held at Rajlovac, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in mid-2014. © Swiss Armed Forces

The main findings are:

- Poor ammunition stockpile management remains a serious problem in much of South-east Europe.
- While unplanned explosions at munitions sites are a global problem, they have been especially prevalent in South-east Europe, at both state and non-state facilities.
- While most countries reported that surplus stockpile levels were decreasing, some registered little change between 2009 and 2014 as military reform, ageing ammunition, and new acquisitions provided a steady flow of surplus ordnance.
- Sales and donations remain the favoured disposal options. A RASR participating state will only opt to destroy its surplus stockpiles upon determining that its marketability is poor.
- Surplus weapons and ammunition destruction in South-east Europe remains largely donor-driven and donor-funded.
- A number of political, regulatory, and commercial constraints hinder regional cooperation with respect to transport and demilitarization.
- In collaboration with other stakeholders, RASR states are making a concerted effort to build, harmonize, and standardize the stockpile management knowledge base through regional technical training.
- In Bosnia and Herzegovina, a long-term, ongoing initiative that is potentially of wider application seeks to integrate technical training into a broader capacity building effort that promotes host-country ownership, organizational reform, and the integration of international standards into national legislation and policy.

This chapter's analysis is largely based on data obtained by the Small Arms Survey in its capacity as one of the five RASR Steering Committee members; additional information was obtained in the framework of an ongoing research project on European Union Force Mobile Training Team 2.1.6.1, which was set up in 2011.

The chapter begins by describing the rationale behind RASR. The second section reviews surplus stockpile, disposal, and storage data declared by RASR participating states between 2008 and 2014. The third section describes the main constraints on regional cooperation with reference to surplus ammunition transport and demilitarization. The final section examines the need, current programmes, and potential opportunities for sustained, comprehensive, and standardized stockpile management capacity building in SEE. ■