

# Defense developments in key Balkan states, 2000-2005

By Ioannis Michaletos

## **Introduction**

In this comparative analysis of defense procurement in four key Balkan states, Greek consultant Ioannis Michaletos gives an overview of the factors influencing government arms buildups, restructuring and modernization of forces at a key moment for the region.

At this time the Balkans is one of the most heavily armed areas in Europe and it remains one of the crucial regions for geo-strategic analysis, as far as the international balance of power is concerned.

It is a peninsula that is sufficiently close to Russia, the Middle East and Western Europe alike to become important in cases of power shifts like the major one that happened after 1989, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Defense developments in the region are thus of profound interest for everyone involved in forecasting, analysis and policy making. This article considers defense procurement trends in four Balkan countries: Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria and Serbia & Montenegro.

## **Preliminary: Reasons for Reform**

The reason for the reforms in all states being considered is to keep costs down, whilst simultaneously achieving greater mobility, flexibility and quick response capabilities. On numerous occasions NATO defense ministers have stretched the importance of the above features for all modern armies. Three of the Balkan states considered here are NATO members, while the fourth (Serbia & Montenegro) would like to be someday. The reason for structural reforms that are proving unpopular due to the increased number of redundancies is the largely American vision of NATO as a rapid reaction force deployable quickly in non-traditional theaters, such as Afghanistan, as part of the new 'war on terror.' Of course, when countries save money by trimming staff, they also have more money to purchase expensive new weaponry produced by America (and the leading EU countries).

There has been much debate regarding the role and relevance of the new European rapid reaction force that came into effect in 2003, vis-à-vis NATO, and what this might imply for the EU's plans for future policing of the continent and perhaps, elsewhere. It is composed of units made up of its respective members, that contribute mobile structures, heavy firepower and professional troops. Therefore all countries that would want to contribute to the European force should have the above infrastructure- another reason for reform among the two Balkan newcomers. But first let's discuss the established regional powers, Greece and Turkey.

### **1.) Greece**

In Greece, a significant trend is currently going on in the defense sector: the reconstruction of the General Staff's services. This involves the standardization of the operational, logistical, personnel and defense planning structures of the Greek army, navy and air force. For this reason a considerable disbandment of directorates and

departments have occurred, and at the same time a new law was passed by parliament in 2003, that eased the seniority-based promotion system for officers, giving more attention to merit-based appointments.

A reduction of the army's general staff personnel by about one-third has been accomplished and respectively, the top positions from brigadier ranks and above. Furthermore, a new planning format for active combat units has been introduced that rely on smaller, mobile and more actively manned units has been introduced. The navy and air force have also performed operational cost-cutting and consigned older ships, planes and armor to the scrap heap, in order to keep costs down and at the same time allow invest in high technology. All of these reforms are in keeping with NATO strategy for reducing troop sizes throughout the alliance member states and redirecting funds to next generation military technology.

On the procurement side of things, the Hellenic army has invested heavily in the Leopard 2HEL armored tank, a German-made model of Krauss-Maffei Wegmann. The total cost for 170 units was 1.7 billion Euros. The tank is considered the best in the world in terms of battle survival prospects and force projection.

Another notable procurement has been the 20 tactical transport helicopters from the French-German NH industry, at a total cost of 657,500 million Euros. Procurements in the Greek navy include 4 U214 submarines made by the HDW shipyards in Hanover, Germany, at a cost of around 1.5 billion Euros. Also, 5 small corvettes are being constructed in the Elefsis yards in Athens, based on a British design, at a total cost of around 740 million euros.

In the Greek air force, considerable attention has been given to new planes. After some debate, 80 F-16's have been ordered (over 2001-2005) from the American firm Lockheed Martin, 15 Mirage 2000-5 from Dassault, and 12 C-27J Spartan transport planes from the Alenia-Lockheed consortium. Lastly, 4 AWACS of the EMB-145H Erieye type were procured from a consortium of Ericsson and Embraer. Approximately 10 billion euros were spent over the period 2000-2005 for military procurements, with the aim of creating forces that rely more on technology and mobile structures. Another 6.5 billion are planned for increasing armaments between now and 2010. There is also talk of Greece planning to acquire some 30 new fighter planes; for the moment the Eurofighter model seems to be the favorite.

## **2.) Turkey**

Turkey has plans to severely reduce its armed forces and create a semi-professional army in the coming decade. Because the devastating Izmit earthquake in 1999 and the banking crisis in 2001, not all previous defense procurement plans have been realized. But the most important ones include 4 Boeing 737 AWACS that are going to be delivered between 2007 and 2008 and the purchase of 1600 Eryx antitank guided missile launchers stipulated in a 485 million Euro agreement with EADS.

The forthcoming plans for the Turkish armed forces include greater attention for sea power. According to analysts and officers, Turkey wants to expand its naval capabilities and construct a navy that would be strong enough to have continuous and parallel activity in the Black Sea, the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean. It is notable that for the first time Turkish attention is being directed into the naval strategic sphere.

On the more usual terrain of ground war, Turkey has plans for 1000 new armored tanks. Its main aim is to be able to manufacture them domestically, something that few countries can do, with the major military contractor Otokar.

Both Greece and Turkey, considered to be long-standing adversaries, have bought weaponry worth around 100 billion Euros over the past 20 years, mainly from the USA, France and Germany. The EU is a major player in their armament and will increasingly become one for the other Balkan states. According to *European Defense*, "the European defence industry is valued at about €30 billion and employs 800,000 people both directly and indirectly."

### **3.) Bulgaria**

At the time, Bulgaria is mainly preoccupied with the reduction of its armed forces, following the mandates of NATO. After its recent inclusion in the alliance, Bulgaria is projecting that the total cut will reach 50% of its active forces. Simultaneously, Western armaments are going to be introduced in order to phase out Bulgaria's Soviet-era weaponry. This is the first time since the creation of the Bulgarian state in the late 19th century that the country seems to be abandoning the preservation of strong troop numbers, changing its historic role to achieve other strategic goals, namely NATO standards and the forthcoming EU accession.

In May 2004, the government unfolded a plan for the armed forces called "Vision and Development for the Armed Forces-2015." It ordains the procurements of certain armaments worth 1.5 billion Levas for the period 2005-2007, for ground and air forces as well as new, high-tech electronics systems. The acquisitions show Bulgaria's strong desire to re-orient its arsenal away from old Soviet-made gear and towards Western production, not surprising in light of Bulgaria's imminent entry into the EU.

Among the goods were 12,900 vehicles from the Daimler-Chrysler group, 12 AS-532AL Cougar helicopters and 6 AS 565MB Panther ones from Eurocopter. Another 8 C27j Spartan transport planes produced by Alenia Aeronautica are to be ordered, and the Belgian navy will provide 1 Wielingen-class corvette. The electronic systems will be obtained from various producers.

### **4.) Serbia & Montenegro**

Years after the wars of the 1990's in the former Yugoslavia, the country still faces relative geopolitical isolation as far as defense procurements are involved. Since Yugoslav times, there has been no notable change in Serbia & Montenegro's arsenal. It is more than certain that in the coming years there is going to be a significant reduction in its armed forces, for economic reasons as well as because of NATO aspirations. According to a recent report posted in M&C news by John C.K Daly, by 2007 compulsory military service will be phased out as Serbia & Montenegro moves towards a fully professional army.

However, there hasn't been much news regarding new procurement, except perhaps for a procurement scandal that shook up the Serbian defense ministry this year. But Serbia, once a great military producer as the major industrial republic of the former Yugoslavia, may well seek to again manufacture what armaments it can domestically. It is assumed that production capacity has been mended following the heavy damage

inflicted by NATO in its 1999 bombing campaign. With its existing defense facilities and factories, Serbia & Montenegro is capable of producing a wide range of ammunitions, electronics, anti-armor and anti-aircraft missiles.

The estimated total size of the army of Serbia & Montenegro is 55,000 personnel. This includes non-combat units, paramedics, telecommunication, civil and aircraft defence battalions and units of virtual mobilization, usually situated in the countryside. Of this total, 28,000 soldiers are on constant active duty. The Serbian army has a unique and quite effective mobilization scheme, in which the armed forces are composed of a three-part force designed for quick mobilization in time of need. The active units are always on call; they are followed by secondary ones, and finally reserves who keep their weaponry and uniforms at home. In a time of total mobilization, they can all appear in the units to which they were originally assigned at the time of their compulsory military service. This is a non-centralized structure that is very flexible for small states. Similar systems operate in Switzerland and Cyprus.

However whether this system can survive the expected downsizing and phasing out of compulsory service remains to be seen. In geopolitical terms, the country is a purely continental power, and its main preoccupation is to command a considerable and well organized infantry and army in general. It is highly likely that this role will be severely strained in the future and it is more than certain to expect grumbling from army officials as their role is gradually reduced.

Such reductions will also lessen the country's traditional geo-strategic capabilities, perhaps the most significant regional trend given the possibility that war with Kosovo Albanians, who are now becoming increasingly well armed, could break out again at some point in the not so distant future. Further, should Montenegro break away from Serbia as is increasingly possible, the end result would see Serbia landlocked and Montenegro left without any realistic means of defending itself in the potential case of conflict with its own Albanian secessionist elements. Reducing Serbia's historic role of military superiority in the Balkans will have far-reaching ramifications for the regional balance of power.

## **Conclusion**

The current article on defense balance in the Balkans covers in general terms the recent defence developments. The trends can be summoned on two levels. First, Greece and Turkey continue the expansion of their military arsenal by acquiring equipment from Western states mostly and are two of most heavily armed states in the world. The aforementioned being also the components of the South Eastern wing of NATO, are situated in a very turbulent region and if we include their long standing animosity, it is more than certain that their armaments race will go on. Bulgaria and Serbia now, are more preoccupied with their inclusion in the Western military and political associations and only the former had in the past five years procured some significant weaponry. Their ambitions for inclusion into the Western clubs will ultimately affect their composition of their armed forces. It is a fair to speculate that in the future the two ex-Eastern bloc countries will phase out their Soviet era armaments and move on, towards the "Westernization" of their arsenals.

## **Appendix: Breakdown of Military Resources by Country**

### **Greece**

**Defense Budget: 7.5 billion euros**

*Troop Numbers, Army:* 99,000

*Troop Numbers, Navy:* 19,850

*Troop Numbers, Air Force:* 24,705

*Tanks:* Leopard & M48 types- 1400

*Artillery:* M270 & RM70 types- 152

*Combat Planes:* F-16, F-4, A-7 and M-2000 types- 333

*Attack Helicopters:* AH-64 Apache type- 20

*Frigates:* MEKO and Kortenaer types- 13

*Submarines:* U-209 type- 8

*SAM's:* 1332 total [Patriot PAC-3 (6 units), S-300 (2 units), Nike Hercules (3 units), Crotale (9 units), TOR M-1 (25 units), OSA-AK (31 units), Hawk (7 units), Sparrow (12 units), Stinger (1237)]

**Turkey**

**Defense Budget: 9.5 billion euros**

*Troop Numbers, Army:* 402,000

*Troop Numbers, Navy:* 51,000

*Troop Numbers, Air Force:* 51,000

*Tanks:* Leopard, M48 & M60 types- 3,432

*Artillery:* M270&T-122 types- 42

*Combat Planes:* F-16, F-4 and F-5 types- 443

*Attack Helicopters:* Cobra and Super Cobra types- 39

*Frigates:* OHP, KNOX & MEKO types- 20

*Submarines:* U-209 type- 11

*SAM's:* 3739 total [Stinger (3648 units), Rapier (83 units), Nike Hercules (8 units)]

**Bulgaria**

**Defense Budget: 1.0 billion euros**

*Troop Numbers, Army:* 28,280

*Troop Numbers, Navy:* 4,400

*Troop Numbers, Air Force:* 15,600

*Tanks:* T-72 type- 429

*Artillery:* BM-21 type- 222

*Combat Planes:* MIG 29, 23, 21& Su 25k types- 206

*Attack Helicopters:* Mi-17 type- 24

*Frigates:* 0

*Submarines:* 0

*SAM's:* 661 total [S-300 (2 units), S-75 (22 units), S-125 (34 units), Strela-10 (20 units), Strela-2 (500 units), 2K-12 (32 units), 2K-11(27), Osa-AK (24 units)]

**Serbia & Montenegro**

**Defense Budget: 0.9 billion euros**

*Troop Numbers, Army:* 55,000

*Troop Numbers, Navy:* 3,500

*Troop Numbers, Air Force:* 10,000

*Tanks:* M84, T-72 & T-64 types- 630

*Artillery:* M77 & M63 types- 72

*Combat Planes:* MIG-29, 21 & Orao types- 125

*Attack Helicopters:* Gazelle type- 65

*Frigates:* 0

*Submarines:* SAVA type- 1

*SAM's:* 994 total [Strela 1 (113 units), Strela 10 (17 units), Igla 1 (200 units), 2K-12 (6 units), S-75 (8 units), S-125 (8 units), Strela 2M (650 units)]

### **Recommended Links**

Some of the sources for this article, as well as other interesting facts, statistics and geo-strategic related information can be found on the following websites:

[Research Institute for European & American Studies](#), Athens

[Institute of Defence Analyses](#), Athens

[Geopolitics.gr](#)

[Strategy.gr](#) (in Greek)

[Armada Publishing](#), Zurich

[International Institute for Strategic Studies \(IISS\)](#), United Kingdom

[International Assessment and Strategy Center \(IASC\)](#), Washington

[Center for Strategic and International Studies \(CSIS\)](#), Washington

[Greek Ministry of Defense](#) (in Greek)

[Turkish Ministry of Defense](#) (in Turkish)

[Bulgarian Ministry of Defense](#) (in Bulgarian and English)

[Serbia & Montenegro Ministry of Defense](#) (in Serbian and English)

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