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SMALL ARMS AND HUMAN SECURITY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: BEYOND CONFLICT AND FATAL VICTIMS

Abstract: In spite of tremendous technological advancements, the most lethal weapons are still small arms, “the real weapons of mass destruction” - they are implicated in several hundred thousand deaths and countless injuries in everything from homicides and suicides, large sale criminality and warfare. The fatalities are only a tip of the iceberg as possession of firearms is related to various forms of structural and cultural violence, primarily against law-abiding and vulnerable groups and individuals, affecting cohesion and security of communities, as well as economic development and trust in public institutions. By applying mixed method, this paper looks into confluence of factors and processes in the Western Balkans which facilitate small arms proliferation, and into local perceptions of small arms possession as a source of (in)security, connected with various forms of violence in broader sense. Research questions are the following: What are the perceptions of citizens about small arms and the impact of their possession and use on their own and communal security? What are hidden forms of violence, specific insecurities and coping strategies among teenagers when faced with small arms related issues at school and in the community? The research is based on focus groups discussions and interviews undertaken in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia within an ongoing regional project on human security the author is affiliated with. This qualitative dimension includes a dialogic method of inquiry, which permits the recognition of the power of the researched in the construction of knowledge of security, and accordingly reflects the conceptual shift represented by human security from states to communities and individuals. It is a more egalitarian and reflexive approach to the research process, where both researchers and subjects were informing how the data were processed and understood. In this way the research allowed for the definition of what security or insecurity means to be constructed in the dialogue directly with the persons involved in discussions, not against a fixed set of indicators which were measured (Kostovicova, Martin and Bojicic-Dzelilovic 2012). Mixed method approach includes the use of available surveys conducted in the region in the last five years, and the information available via *Ushahidi platform* within “Targeting Weapons” UNDP pilot campaign – voluntary submitted comments and the media reports related to small arms in Serbia. The dominant perceptions of youth are that they are living in unfinished states or unfinished peace, which blur the lines between illegal and legal, legitimate and illegiti-

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mate, victims and perpetrators. Such insecurity perpetuates structural and symbolic violence. There is a need to address the complexity of dual role of arms and different impact on individuals and various social groups.

Keywords: *small arms, human security, violence, small arms surveys, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, youth*

1. INTRODUCTION

The issues related to arms and weapons have always been a core concern of individual, community, national and international security. Small arms are weapons that fire a projectile and are designated for individual use, such as revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, sub-machine guns and light machine guns (UN 1997).² They are easy to conceal, simple to handle, have very long life-span and low maintenance costs. Small arms have a transformative or multiplier effect on coercion and violence (Frey 2004:37). Its role in sudden and harmful downturns in everyday life at home, work or community, make small arms “Human Security’s elephant in the room” (Engvig 2014:1). However, within the concept and practice of human security there is also selective pursuit of particular issues: child soldiers not military spending; the illicit trafficking in small arms but not the “legal” trade (Krause 2014a); focus on arms trade or crime control perspectives. Targeting areas for small arms control in global South might be seen as the reproduction of hierarchical, imperial relations (Stavrianakis 2011). Considering local contexts and individual perceptions of insecurity as core principles of the human security approach, this research provides insights about localized and contextualized experiences of the role of small arms in provision of (in)security in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo.³ Using bottom-up approach and taking into account personal and day to day forms of threats and vulnerability, the focus is on those who are insecure, the interactions between individuals and the security problematic.

The paper argues that there is a specific confluence of factors that has enabled small arms proliferation, which has been an important element of the structural context which affects the security of young people. It looks not only into experiences of personal/direct violence, but into young people’s argumentation *for* or *against* small arms possession – as a source of (in)security and related structural and cultural violence which impacts everyday lives by empowering some at the expense of others.

The research is based on mixed method approach: a broader security context and trends are analysed by consulting the available quantitative surveys and media reports, while specific insecurities and coping strategies among the youth in their everyday life are explored by using qualitative methods. The interviews and focus groups discussions apply the *dia-*

2 International documents are usually concerned with “small arms and light weapons”, SALW. The term “light weapons” designates heavy machine guns, portable anti-aircraft guns, and other units or systems which may be carried by a small number of people, or transported by a pack animal or a light vehicle. Ammunition and explosives take an integral part of the SALW within which they are used. “Small arms” is frequently used as a broader term, including light weapons. See: <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/weapons-and-markets/definitions.html>

3 The term Western Balkans is used here for four countries included in the research: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo. These countries are substantial part of the regional security sub-complex which includes also Albania and Macedonia. Regional Security Complexes are durable patterns of amity and enmity taking the form of sub-global, geographically coherent patterns of security interdependence which are more intense within the complex than between states inside the complex and those outside it (Buzan, Weaver 2003:45-46).

logue as a research tool to access and assess human security which permits the recognition of the power of the researched in the construction of the knowledge of security (Kostovicova, Martin, Bojicic-Dzelilovic 2012). The author believes it is particularly relevant for researching issues related to illegal activities, as surveys in such cases tend to face high percentage of refusals, “do not know” answers or generic socially accepted answers.⁴ Focus groups discussion with high school students regarding their (in)security and violence were conducted in Brcko, Bijeljina, Tuzla, Orasje (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Podgorica, Kotor, Bijelo Polje (Montenegro), Belgrade, Novi Pazar (Serbia), Prishtina, Kosovo Polje, Prizren (Kosovo).⁵ Additional dialogues related to small arms issue were conducted with youth activists (15-24 years old) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the only country with an ongoing campaign for voluntary collection of illegal arms, and the country where the floods in May and August of 2014 have literally surfaced huge quantities of arms. Bijeljina, Brcko and Tuzla – three selected locations – have different ethnic composition and administrative positions in Bosnia. The dialogues were conducted with the youth activists under the assumption that they have a range of contacts in the community and that they will be prone to speak more openly.

This Introduction is followed by Chapter 2 which looks into specific confluence of political, economic, cultural and spatial/geographical factors in the Western Balkans which enabled small arms proliferation in the 1990s. The sources of illegal arms, their relevance after various forms of interventions in this region (2.2), the spaces and manifestations of arms-related incidents and the dynamic of security perceptions in the context of arms possession (2.3) are explored. Chapter 3 presents the findings on youth’s interaction with and understanding of small arms as a source of (in)security in different spaces and social relations, including their coping strategies. Chapter 4 offers the conclusions on various forms of structural and symbolic violence in the context of arms possession and human security approach.

4 In particular, it is risky to take a survey’s findings for granted in designing campaigns of voluntary collection of illegal arms. The most notable case was the household survey within the *Small Arms Survey Baseline Assessment* for the Illegal Small Arms Control Project (ISAC) campaign in Kosovo in 2003. The Assessment stressed that “Kosovans do not appear to be as attached to their weapons as commonly believed”, and more than 50% respondents thought it “very” or “somewhat likely” that people in their neighborhood would hand in their guns in exchange for investments in their community. However, after a massive awareness raising campaign, and with the incentive to provide developmental grants for municipalities which surrender 300+ weapons, only 155 illegal small arms items were collected by all municipalities in Kosovo combined (Djurdjevic-Lukic 2005).

5 Focus groups discussions in high schools were conducted by Vigan Behlulji, Jasmin Jasarevic, Ruzica Madzarevic, Ivana Suboticki, and associates from Center for Research, Documentation and Publications, Prishtina, Youth Resource Center (ORC) Tuzla, Association for Democratic Prosperity ZID, Podgorica, and SeConS - Development Initiative, Belgrade. It was undertaken within the regional research “Forms and Spaces of Violence in the Western Balkans and Turkey” organized by the Citizens’ Network for Peace, Reconciliation and Human Security, according to the methodology developed by Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic and Mary Martin from the London School of Economics (including Martin 2014). The author is grateful to Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic and Mary Martin for providing valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

2. CONFLUENCE OF FACTORS AND CONTEXTS OF SMALL ARMS PROLIFERATION

2.1. Global and regional dynamic fuelling small arms proliferation in the Western Balkans

Dramatic increase of the small arms proliferation in the last 25 years is one of the main features of the post-Cold War era's security environment, which is characterized by raise of non-state actors, lower transport costs and "shrinking spaces" in the era of globalisation. Political fragmentation, numerous local and identity-driven armed conflicts, formation of new states and prolonged political and economic transitions have contributed to evolving transnational organized crime networks, new types of war economies and forced migrations (Lumpe 2000; Naim 2003; Nordstrom 2007; Friman 2009; Kaldor, Rangelov 2014). Arms possession, threat of use and actual use of it, are common for all the above listed phenomena. Geopolitical changes made massive conscripts' armies and their arms redundant, leading to stockpiles leakages, especially in the former communist states. Likewise, the dynamics of state weakening have contributed to the re-traditionalization of culture in certain countries, including guns possession by civilians and non-state groups serving both as protectors and predators. Simultaneously, the notion of imminent global spread of democracy and liberal values prompted the implementation of various embargo regimes to the countries considered as violators of human rights. Arms embargoes have jeopardized huge financial interests, and have made SALW a particularly valuable commodity for smuggling to selected locations (Brzoska, Lopez 2009).

This brief overview of the main manifestation of changed security environment provides framework within which the small arms issue has become highly relevant for the Western Balkans. All the processes outlined above have deeply affected this region. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) was among the leading producers of small arms, amounting to annual export of \$3 billion (SAS 2003). Beside advanced arms industry, the SFRY has had a massive security apparatus, conscript army and reserves duties – i.e. citizens trained to use arms and entitled to possess it.⁶ Additionally, widespread arms possession was sourced in tradition of liberation movements and seen as precious family's heritage, the object of pride for persons involved in arms production, or a tool of self-help and/or symbol of distrust in the state within certain local communities.⁷ The firearms have been regularly used in celebrating social and family occasions such as weddings, births, holidays or sport victories (SEESAC 2006).

Massive production of small arms and millions of men who had been trained to use it, contributed to the severity of civil wars for the new states' formation in the 1990s. Hundreds of thousands of victims, the brutality of forced migrations and ethnic cleansing have left many individuals and communities traumatized, without confidence in other ethnic/religious groups and/or in the state. At the same time, the wars and harsh international sanctions led to informal economy blurring the line between illegal and legal especially

6 On the top of 180,000 active members, the Yugoslav People's Army had more than half million of the reserve. All republics within the former Yugoslavia had their civilian reserve ("teritorijalna odbrana" – territorial defence) of around 1.5 million people. Brief overview of personnel and weapons in: Aleksandar Ciric, Uspon i sunovrat Jugoslovenske narodne armije, *Vreme* br. 894, 21 February 2008.

7 According to Small Arms Survey, in the former Yugoslavia (SFRY) before its break-up 2.3 million rifles were stockpiled for military use and 1.6 million weapons were registered for personal use (SAS 2001).

from the point of view of people struggling with poverty and violence (Hajdinjak 2002). The sanctions targeting arms trade were a magnet for greedy profiteers and patriotic Diasporas, facilitating transnational organized crime involvement (Strazzari 2008).

As numerous armed groups of various scopes, goals and affiliations were involved in the “new wars” (Kaldor 1999), a long period of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of various militias and former combatants was required. Low-level violence by localized insurgent groups such as the Liberation Army of Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac and the Albanian National Army (SAS 2002:89) preserved an insecure environment and risk of tensions escalation in the early 2000s. As an inevitable part of state-building, new armed forces become the symbol of statehood, while vetting and sensitization for a rule of law have not been carefully enforced (Heinemann-Grüder, Paes 2001; Djurdjevic-Lukic 2007). This in turn has created a space for reinforcement of violent behaviour in their ranks. Conflict-related grievances, post-traumatizing syndromes, dislocations, as well as lack of economic opportunities, all enabled permissive surroundings for crime, family violence and community violence, contributing to widespread possession of small arms as a means of self-protection in this region (Davis 2002; Quin at al. 2003; Atonopoulos 2008).

Alongside these historic and economic factors, geographical dimension is of great significance in the proliferation of small arms in the region. The Western Balkans position in the immediate neighbourhood of the EU member-states makes the region important route for trafficking of illegal commodities such as small arms, which are many times higher priced on the illegal markets within the EU (Davis at al. 2001).

2.2. Interventions and their limits: A house isn't a home without a gun

Massive international presence and/or support for post-conflict recovery, state-building and transition, have included the activities related to small arms control in this region: addressing demobilization and reintegration of former combatants; establishing the legal framework for tracing, marking and transferring of small arms, civilian possession and use; upgrading storage systems; destruction of surplus ammunition and weapons; combating trafficking; reforming the security sector; increasing transparency and accountability. Numerous campaigns of illegal arms collection took place during the 1990s and early 2000s.⁸ International documents and regimes, established by the UN, OSCE and the EU, and specifically under the South East Europe Regional Implementation Plans “Combating the Proliferation and Impact of Small Arms and Light Weapons” (2001, 2006) have provided a framework for the governments to establish legal foundations and increased transparency in that area. However, the initiatives to combat organized crime and control small arms proliferation have not had substantial impact on what is happening in everyday life (Grillot 2010; Prezelj 2010), especially due to reduction to rational choice approach toward the issues (Arsovska, Kostakos 2008; Stavrianakis 2011).

The dynamic of the supply and demand of small arms was assessed back in 2002 as conditioned primarily by unresolved conflicts/status issues, powerful crime networks, and cultural encouragement of violence, with influx of economic factors, issues related to com-

⁸ The literature addressing these issues includes numerous reports by the UN and its missions in the Balkans, NATO, OSCE, EU, and specifically publications of the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (www.seesac.org); documents issued by national authorities, surveys and analytical contributions by the Saferworld, Small Arms Survey and Bonn International Centre for Conversion.

munity cohesiveness, structure of security forces, ineffectiveness of the judicial system, and status of border area (Davis 2002). Dozen years later, many of these issues are still open or reopen due to economic crisis and political volatility. Politicization of the security structures and partial criminalization at the eve of the dissolution of the SFRY, reinforced by the decade of bloodshed, made both national and transnational aspects of organized crime in the Western Balkans exceptionally hard to grasp (Bendek, Daase, Dimitrijevic, van Dyne 2010; Kostovicova, Bojicic-Dzelilovic 2008). Criminal networks in the region take advantage of porous borders, shared languages, and doubled citizenships (Anastasi-jevic 2010).

National identity issues, which served as “the organizing centre of struggle and fear” (Buzan, Weaver 2003: 384) in the 1990s, are still relevant. There is an array of internal, bilateral and sub-regional disputes, which have not been fully resolved either by the peace agreements, or by the EU accession process. Alongside highly prominent key political issues in the 2000s - Kosovo’s status, the degree of unity in BH, and the cooperation with the ICTY - there have been prolonged disputes in defining the polity/citizenship, refugees’ and states’ properties, unfinished territorial demarcations, cultural and symbolic allegiances such as the use of alphabet, names of a state, language, and the status of the Orthodox Church (Djordjevic-Lukic 2010). These issues impact on the perception of individual and groups’ security.

Namely, perceptions of security are by default locally contextualized, highly volatile and sensitive to security, politics, economy and cultural dynamic at various levels. It leads to frequent local “ups and downs” when it comes to security in general and importance of arms possession in particular, which are difficult to be detected. Several surveys conducted in the last five years in Kosovo (Saferworld 2009; 2010; 2011) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNDP 2010-2011; UNICEF 2010), indicate gradual changes regarding perceptions of (in)security, including the weapons possession 12-15 years after the end of conflicts. Estimations for Bosnia and Herzegovina are that 34% of citizens have weapons, with nearly 350,000 legally owned and nearly 750,000 illegally owned (UNDP 2010-2011). In Kosovo around 25% of respondents felt that weapons ownership makes - or would make - them or their families safer (Forum for Civic Initiatives and Saferworld 2010:12). Around 37% of respondents considered that allowing firearms possession is okay (Di Lellio 2009:18). However, resistance of respondents when it comes to questions on weapons is still substantial: between half and three quarters of respondents either said “don’t know” or refused to answer any question on weapons ownership (Di Lellio 2009:19).

The perceptions are not necessarily changing in linear progression as it might imply the dominant discourse of the region’s Europeanization. The official data of law enforcement agencies has found there is no improvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina with regard to the number of criminal offences committed with small arms: such offences actually increased for 50% between 2007 and 2009 (UNDP 2010-2011:5). In 2010 more Kosovo respondents were interested in acquiring weapons than in 2009 (Bennet, Saferworld 2011).⁹ Respondents’ assessments in the most recent study include the following: “*Every household has a weapon. Maybe not only one, but for each family member*” (Benett, Saferworld 2011:11).¹⁰

9 People reported feeling less secure than they did a year ago; the reputation of the Kosovo Police particularly suffered. The following year a serious decline in public perceptions of safety and security was found, but no rise in demand for arms.

10 All family members are probably understood as only male. However, there is a survey’s finding that women are

It echoes earlier findings in Montenegro: “A house isn’t a home without a gun” (SEESAC 2004). The estimation that one in five BH citizens owned a weapon illegally in 2010 also indicates the increase from 16% of citizens possessing arms illegally as found in a survey from 2004 (UNDP 2010-2011:8).

2.3. Legal and illegal arms and (in)securities in everyday life

Zooming in on the issue of small arms further, it is possible to unravel the concrete sources of illegal arms and look into their presence in this region. There are multiple ways of how legal arms can become illegal under international and/or national laws. According to international law, arms are illegal when exported to a UN embargoed destination or transferred without the required documentation (end-user certificate). It impacts the arms producers, exporting companies and national authorities which are in charge of granting licenses and export permissions, enforcement and monitoring. Legacy of substantial arms production and trade is still alive: for example, Serbia occupies prominent 22nd place among the most significant global traders according to social network analysis (Engvig 2014).¹¹ While political costs of noncompliance to international embargos for a country in question are an issue, there is a huge pressure from the producers to provide markets and sustain workforce, and substantial problems in controlling numerous arms export companies.¹² It is especially the case in the times of economic crisis which has had severe impact on this region motivating these countries not to support always the embargos imposed by the European Union in spite of their aspirations to the EU membership.

According to national laws, arms may be illegal when civilians have arms that are not allowed (bigger calibre, grantees etc.), or when the citizen does not have the proper license (for a weapon otherwise allowed, or uses license for possession to carry arms). To reduce this key source of arms misuse, prerequisite is not only comprehensive legislation, but consistent enforcement. However, it is a key weakness of governance in the region, according to annual reports of the European Commission. Transformation of illegal weapons into legal is affected by the scope of required procedure for obtaining a license - usually quite complicated, and costs of registration, i.e. tax for legal possession - always too high for many people in the region. These issues are sometimes seen as reasons for decreased number of registered weapons.¹³ An additional source of illegal arms possession is leakage of stockpiles, be they held by police, military or a private company.¹⁴ Immense scale of the Yugoslav Army infrastructure, the wars and formation of new storages, left many stockpiles scattered across the region. Their proper maintenance involves substantial financial and manpower costs, as well as technical expertise in explosive ordnance management, all of which are frequently missing.¹⁵

considered by 42,8% of the population part of the decision making process of bringing weapons into household so that arms might be viewed property of a household, rather than signifiers of masculinity (Di Lellio 2009).

11 Serbia, BH, Montenegro and Kosovo are not parties of the key international mechanism - Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Control of Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies (as of November 2014).

12 There are more than 200 companies registered for arms export in Serbia (Bjelica, manuscript, October 2014).

13 In BH number of registered weapons decreased for 5.604 between 2004 and 2009 (UNDP 2010-2011:12).

14 The extreme case of post-communist states stockpiles looting was in Albania in 1997, when estimated around 600,000 SALW were overtaken by civilians (Heinemann-Grüder, Paes 2001:13). Smuggling of those arms has contributed to the raise of armed formation KLA in Kosovo.

15 Recent case of arms leakage was from storage at the Belgrade Airport, from where automatic weapons belonging to the Yugoimport SDPR Company were supposed to be shipped to a buyer abroad. See: 8 October 2014. <http://>

Illegal arms could be obtained through illegal exchange among the citizens, including paramilitary units and criminals, or through illegal company actions - unlicensed production, weapons leaking from the factory onto the black market, or illegal sales. In the region with fragile rule of law, and in times of transition and economic crisis, all of these sources of procurement of illegal arms are relevant.¹⁶

Persistent grey areas of the economy and crime, including the trafficking and smuggling of drugs¹⁷ and people, including kidnapping¹⁸ and usury,¹⁹ are connected with illegal arms possession. Notoriously porous borders, coupled with widespread corruption (Transparency International 2013), facilitate the illegal arms smuggling. Substantial difference in price of arms in this sub-region and in the EU member states - an AK-47 is roughly three times more expensive (Krause 2014) - presents the additional incentive for smuggling not only for organized crime structures, but for adventurous and/or impoverished individuals. Terrorism and prolonged conflict in the Middle East additionally foster demand for arms among the members of extremists' groups in the countries under exploration in this paper.²⁰

The data about arms-related incidents have documented that its misuse is related not only to traditional and organized crime activities which are present in many other countries such as smuggling arms across borders,²¹ use of arms in burglaries,²² robberies,²³ and incidents related to gambling.²⁴ There are wartime hoards - weapons and explosives from long gone wars,²⁵ or recent conflicts,²⁶ stashed to be used in the next wave of violence and potential politically motivated actions.²⁷ There is severe distance between security structures and certain local communities manifested as trans-border movement by criminal armed groups clashing with security forces,²⁸ and the attacks on law enforcement officials.²⁹

www.b92.net/eng/news/crimes.php?yyyy=2014&mm=10&dd=09&nav_id=91843 & <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/501020/UZBUNA-NA-AERODROMU-Ukradeno-oruzje-iz-magacina>.

16 In the remaining part of this subsection the focus is primarily on Serbia as there is a useful source of data - an online platform <http://www.oruzjenameti.org/> launched in August 2012 within "Targeting the Weapons" pilot project developed by the South Eastern & Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms (SEESAC). The platform provides small arms related news, reports submitted by citizens who saw small arms and personal opinions and attitudes related to arms. At the time of writing it contained 409 entrants. The incidents are cited according to the original source, primarily daily *Blic*.

17 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/489193/Petoro-uhapseno-zbog-droge-i-oruzja>

18 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/461678/Uhapsene-tri-osobe-zbog-otmice-i-iznude>

19 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/472539/Taksistu-ubio-zbog-duga>

20 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/397555/Krivicna-prijava-protiv-vehabija-zbog-nelegalnog-oruzja> 6/8/ 2013

21 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/486618/Spreceno-krijumcarenje-vazdusne-puske-na-Batrovcima>

22 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/486384/Opljackana-posta-potruga-za-razbojnicima>

23 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/492658/Pucali-u-glavu-vlasniku-zlatare-na-Bezanijskoj-kosi>

24 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/492714/Mladic-upucan-sa-tri-metka-u-kladionici>

25 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/490460/Policija-cisti-cetnicki-arsenal;> <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/486058/Otac-i-sin-povredjeni-u-eksploziji-bombe>

26 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/473172/Nadjen-arsenal-oruzja-Oslobodilacke-vojske-Preseva-Medvedja-i-Bujanovca>, 13 June 2014

27 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/397555/Krivicna-prijava-protiv-vehabija-zbog-nelegalnog-oruzja> 6 August 2013

28 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/490999/OKRSAJ-NA-MERDARU-Zandarm-ubijen-Stefanovic-salje-jake-policijske-snage>

29 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/494573/Molotovljev-koktel-bacen-u-dvoriste-policijskog-sluzbenika-u-Bujanovcu>

Economic incentives, history and ideology are not the only sources of problems, nor are only illegally possessed small arms. The individuals and groups who are legally entitled to have small arms in their professional capacity as members of various legal security structures misuse small arms within the family, in a community, or in relation to their official duty. Likewise, the civilians who acquired firearms legally may create insecurity and violence both intentionally and non-intentionally.³⁰ There is selective support for and enforcement of recently passed laws regulating arms possession, carrying and use.³¹ Persistent lack of high professional standards of security structures is evident from their involvement in weapons misuse, ranging from cultural i.e. celebratory gunfire,³² to intimidation of colleagues³³ or civilians,³⁴ up to killing civilians in lieu with financial gains.³⁵ Problems in law enforcement are reflected in the cases of corruption of police officers such as returning weapons to criminals,³⁶ or jeopardizing lives by inactivity – not revoking firearms licenses to persons with a history of family violence and bullying.³⁷ Such behaviour represents state's failure to act with due diligence from the point of international human rights law (Frey 2004), but actions like these are part of the milieu under which the citizens in the Western Balkans struggle for security provision.

Alongside versatile forms of arms-related violence, the analysis of places related to misuse of arms demonstrates that there is no space which might be considered safe. Incidents are documented in private apartments and office space, at school yards, in front of a kindergarten, behind a church, in parks, parking lots, gyms, trains, shopping malls, hunting, restaurants, etc.³⁸ Furthermore, arms-related violence is present in all types of settlements, ranging from small villages to the cities, in all regions within Serbia.³⁹

30 Examples of unintentional misuse are deadly incidents involving minors who had an easy access to family's weapons, such as: <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/480887/Decak-lovackom-puskom-ubio-najboljeg-prijatelja>

31 Celebratory use of firearms is not sanctioned. For example, Tomislav Nikolic, President of Serbia, publicly stated he expected celebratory fire throughout Serbia after Serbia's team won water polo championship in July 2014.

32 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/505889/Policajac-se-upuca-na-svadbi-svog-sina>

33 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/448627/Vranje-Policajac-senlucio-napao-kolegu-koji-ga-je-priveo-pa-pokusao-da-pobegne> 10 March 2014

34 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/462402/Policajac-pevacici-oblacio-uniformu-i-puca> 4 May 2014

35 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/393731/Saznajemo-Zandarm-ubio-pa-spalio-dvojicu-mladica-u-audiju-jer-im-je-dugovao-7000-evra>

36 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/494048/Sef-policije-vratio-pistolj-kriminalcu>

37 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/494048/Sef-policije-vratio-pistolj-kriminalcu>. Not applying legal procedure of confiscation of weapons used by male persons against female partners might be motivated not by bribery, but due to underestimation of gender based violence represents a form of cultural i.e. symbolic violence.

38 Cases documented by the platform "Targeting Weapons", August 2012 – November 2014. The map is available at: <http://www.oruzjenameti.org/main>

39 The locations range from a hamlet Suvi Do in tiny municipality Zagubica in Eastern Serbia, to village Stavo in the mountains area bordering Kosovo, up to 166 registered cases in the area of capital Belgrade, by 3 November 2014. Map available at: <http://www.oruzjenameti.org/main>

3. SMALL ARMS AND INSECURITY OF YOUTH IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

3.1. Space of insecurity: school

How the elaborated confluence of factors sustaining widespread possession and misuse of small arms, and indications of numerous spaces of related violence, reverberates on young people's perceptions of security and the role of arms? The available studies on perceptions and attitudes towards small arms have conveyed many signals about youth's exposure to small arms. Older researches among elementary and high school students in Belgrade (SEESAC 2004) and in Montenegro (SEESAC 2006) documented alarming familiarity with firearm and motivations for carrying a weapon: improved self-image; traditional values and fear from threats; revenge; vendettas.⁴⁰ Research conducted after the start of ongoing economic crisis, such as in Bosnia in 2010 stresses widespread "macho culture", leading many young men in need of firearms to feel strong and important, as there is no other life prospect for them. Almost quarter of households in BH was affected by some forms of family violence, with substantial direct and indirect impact on children (UNDP 2010-2011). Another study found that even children consider it is easy to purchase small arms on the black market (UNICEF 2010). In Kosovo there was a noticeable raise of preparedness to obtain weapons in the age group 18-29 (Bennet, Saferworld 2011) which includes final year high school students.

More recent data available via online platform "Targeting Weapons" also indicate the important role of small arms in security dynamics among youth, and specifically in school: *"In my town high school student have firearms available and most of them carry it with them under pretext of self-defence. It is not true as they carry them to threaten peers and to manipulate with them when they are frightened."*⁴¹ Incidents include armed persons entering school building and attacking staff,⁴² and minors shooting in front of a school.⁴³

While school is supposed to be a secure space devoted not only to knowledge transfer, but also norms transfer in a zone of safety for physical, mental and social wellbeing, the findings indicating the frequency of small arms related incidents are not negligible. The cases of students bringing firearms to schools are documented in the course of qualitative research on peer-to-peer violence within the project of which this research is a part of. Many interlocutors among high school students in 12 towns/cities in four countries were able to recall the examples of its presence in the school; drastic ones include the following:

*"My cousin was bringing firearms to school, later he shot himself with the rifle."*⁴⁴

*"A gun was brought into classroom, even showed to teacher, and she did not do anything."*⁴⁵

*"Last month, they found a small bag of weed, and a weapon, in the classroom."*⁴⁶

40 Motivations listed are from focus groups with high school students in Montenegro.

41 Comment submitted on 31 October 2012, from Pancevo, at: <http://www.oruzjenameti.org/reports/view/67>.

42 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/506562/Pistoljem-udarao-u-glavu-direktora-skole-u-Lebanu> 29 October 2014

43 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/492633/Maloletnik-pucao-u-vrsnjaka-ispred-skole-u-Novom-Pazaru> 3/9/2014

44 Focus group discussion, Brcko, 25 April 2014

45 Focus group discussion, Bijelo Polje, 18 May 2014

46 Focus group discussion, Prishtina, 20 May 2014

“A student put gun on teacher’s desk and then got a better mark.”⁴⁷

There is a certain level of accommodation to small arms presence: the management of a school in Montenegro considers two cases per year as a low number of incidents involving arms; a student did not find bringing a gun to school intimidating.⁴⁸ Reporting an explosive device to be planted in a school building has been practised through the region by students eager to avoid classes, instigating fear among classmates. Ineffective institutional strategies to deal with peer-to-peer violence, especially in cases of psychological violence, might lead to escalation which includes use of small arms and fatal victims:

*“That guy had some breathing tool, implanted or not - I don’t know, but aesthetically that looked strange. Someone teased him; the guy went home, came back with a rifle and shot at everybody. He killed one guy and other managed to escape just because the rifle stuck. If the rifle didn’t stuck, that would be a massacre. Long time after that the hole from bullets and blood were visible behind the school”.*⁴⁹

3.2. Space of insecurity: community

Sensitivity of issues related to small arms possession and use makes surveys unreliable, but use of focus groups discussion as qualitative method in such official setting as school, might affect insights due to fear of self-incrimination or incrimination of friends. Hence, the additional field work has been undertaken using dialogue as a research tool in Bijeljina, Brcko and Tuzla to gain deeper insight about a complex story of lived insecurity involving arms and coping strategies practised by youth.

The youth activists engaged in a dialogue positioned themselves as pacifists who disliked weapons and did not possess it. Nevertheless, their relations with arms or people possessing arms have proved frequent. Numerous recollections of people, places and situations related to firearms making them insecure have unfold, including local clubs, streets, parks, roads.⁵⁰ The examples of interactions included a young person who showed friends in a way to a picnic a gun permanently stored in his SUV,⁵¹ a teenager taking gun to the seminar “United in diversity” in another BH entity “just in case”.⁵² Lively black market is documented: a teenager who admitted to a friend that he sold occasionally arms from father’s illegal arsenal to earn some money.⁵³ “Everybody knows someone who knows someone who sells arms.”⁵⁴ Gender gap in noticeable: a youngster (17) asked a girl on a date to throw hand grenades to river;⁵⁵ arms are used for coercing girls to stay in a relationship.⁵⁶ These

47 Focus group discussion, Bijelo Polje, 18 May 2014.

48 A student brought father’s official pistol to the male-only high school class to show it to classmates. Focus group discussion, Herceg Novi, 16 May 2014.

49 Focus group discussion, Bijeljina, 9 July 2014.

50 Statements include: “I know at least 20 people who have firearms; some of them have chests of weapons” (Tuzla); “He told me he has enough weapons for everybody in the entire street” (Bijeljina); and “Almost everybody has a gun” (Tuzla). In this section most illustrative and condensed statements are cited, with the note about the place and date.

51 Bijeljina, 16 August 2014.

52 Tuzla, 9 September 2014.

53 Bijeljina, 16 August 2014.

54 Brcko, 10 September 2014.

55 Tuzla, 9 September 2014.

56 Bijeljina, 16 August 2014.

personal experiences capture pervasiveness of small arms in youth's everyday life and dilemmas such interactions open to youth how to cope with it.

Further exploration of security needs and security environment has revealed that firearms ownership is considered as self-explanatory if a person possesses a business or substantial property,⁵⁷ as inability of official security structures to provide protection is taken as granted.⁵⁸ While the need for arms possession by businesses/property owners is viewed as legitimate, it still makes interlocutors insecure when they see it and leads them to walk away from the places or persons who reveal their possession.⁵⁹ Possession of weapons by war veterans and refugees is also considered as normal from the perspective of the holders - for many who survived either being at gunpoint or because of having a gun, the possession of arms may be felt as a life-time necessity.⁶⁰ However, there is notion it jeopardizes community security due to widespread post-traumatic stress disorders among such population.⁶¹ These views capture contradiction of arms represented both as source of security and insecurity within the same community, empowering some at the expense of others.

At the same time, there is another perception of war veterans – as “high ranking in society”, a category explained to include “*businessmen, persons who run places with patrons; someone who drives an expensive car, who was in war, who saw a lot and he knows he needs a gun.*”⁶² War profiteers and their children have been frequently perceived as carriers of arms.⁶³

Other categories of people described as in possession of small arms include inhibited youngsters, “macho boys” and wannabe gangsters,⁶⁴ i.e. non legitimate owners who create another layer of insecurity.

Coping strategies which have been practised among young people are limited to extracting himself/herself from company of persons in possession of arms, or accommodate to it. Avoidance of persons in possession of arms contributes to reduction of circle of friends and places which are part of social life,⁶⁵ and do not provide guarantees for enhanced security.⁶⁶ Disturbing examples of accommodation are related also to gender-based violence:

57 “*It practically goes together with good car.*” Brcko, 10 September 2014.

58 “*Public authorities do nothing, there is lot of criminal activities, and people have to possess guns as they know there would not be protected.*”

59 It is especially pronounced among female and younger interlocutors (dialogues in Bijeljina, Brcko and Tuzla).

60 “*Some people were warriors in the war and it is normal for them; I believe the majority of them who were in tranches now have firearms.*” Brcko, 10 September 2014.

61 “*All of them who are refugees have arms; all of them were in war and have psychological problems. It is a common knowledge.*” Bijeljina, 16 August 2014.

62 Brcko, 10 September 2014.

63 “*His father is a war profiteer, excessively rich; when police stops him and he says whose son he is, they just reply: Thank you, goodbye. Once he opened a compartment in his SUV and a gun was there. It is probably from his father.*” Bijeljina, 16 August 2014.

64 “*Wanna be criminals, rich parents' children, who have someone placed in high positions, and then the police cannot easily interfere; most of them are minor so there is not enough room to go against them. It is a common knowledge. Children who are not confident, who are unstable, and then they want to compensate that.*” Tuzla, 9 September 2014.

65 “*It is a pity I cannot socialize with him anymore, as we had been close, but as I know he has all these firearms, I cannot take a risk to say something he might dislike, to take his gun and point to me!*” Bijeljina, 16 August 2014. “*I was horrified to see a barman to carry gun even at 7 a.m. when there was nobody around...I do not go there anymore*” Tuzla, 9 September 2014. “*I told him to stop the car so that I can go out, as I do not want to be close to arms.*” Bijeljina, 16 August 2014.

66 “*The guy [who sells firearms] is my neighbour. If he is drunk and I stroll around, he can take his gun, point at me and that would be my end!*” Bijeljina, 16 August 2014

*“That girl was normal, had practised folk dancing, but then she started a relationship with a guy from a bad company. I told her to break up, and she explained she did it, and then he showed up with a gun, pointed it to her head and told her: You have to be with me, or I would blow up your head! She told me that when she was in that relationship one month; after that she has changed, he involved her on his side; she even included her younger brother in that group.”*⁶⁷

Formal law enforcement agents in security provision are marginalized and surrendering illegal weapons is regarded as unwise due to mistrust in the police.⁶⁸ Law enforcement structures are considered as incompetent to provide security and/or provide anonymity for potential surrenders.⁶⁹ Furthermore, there is a lack of trust into campaigns aimed to reduction of civilians’ possession of arms as officials are perceived as motivated by tangible gains, leading to conviction that that they will sell on collected arms.⁷⁰

Expanding the issue further on broader level of community, there is a paradox: while the interlocutors are personally distancing from possession of illegal arms, such an attitude has not necessarily been transcended to the extended family and community of co-ethnics who possess illegal arms. Narrative of perpetual history and absence of larger scale interethnic reconciliation creates latent fears which are used to justify arms possession.

*“I fully understand these people. War was 100 years ago, 70 years ago, 20 years ago - there are no guarantees that one will not be again tomorrow. It is simply fear as every generation took part in a war, that they expect sooner or later they will have to go to a war again, and that it is the reason they keep weapons... Maybe the best way is to bury weapons in a garden.”*⁷¹

*“People say they have weapons as they believe that a war will happen again, it is inevitable, the state is established in such a way that new conflict may be triggered at any moment, so they feel safer with firearms - especially refugees or people living at a line of separation, where at any moment they can feel fear from other and different. Older people tend to speak more frequently that at any moment we can expect a conflict, either internal or external.”*⁷²

There is knowledge about the same narrative in neighbouring countries:

*“When I was in Kosovo, I was told that every house has weapons, in our house – of our relatives – there is also ammunition, even there are children, which is unbearable. But it is fine for them as they say Serbs will fire again at certain point, so better we shoot them than that they shoot us. It is such mentality over there.”*⁷³

67 Bijeljina, 16 August 2014

68 Low level of trust into BH police was the first reason for arms possession according to most recent survey (UNDP 2010-2011)

69 *“Every year they try to influence citizens to get rid of weapons, but citizens do not trust them. They claim there is an amnesty, but they take names of people who surrender weapons and there is no trust they would not be blamed for something. And people generally do not trust the police.”* Bijeljina, 16 August 2014.

70 A: *“Who knows what they actually do with those weapons later, there are no guarantees”*; L: *“Maybe they sell them out.”* Bijeljina, 16 August 2014

71 Bijeljina, 16 August 2014

72 *“If there is the issue of Brcko District’s division, independence of Republica Srpska, the abolishment of cantons – whatever pops up, we can expect conflict.”* Tuzla, 9 September 2014

73 Tuzla, 9 September 2014

This is another form of illegal possession, more covert, even literary buried deeply, which is put in longer historical perspective and based on ethnic grievances, i.e. the community of co-ethnics preparedness. Its legitimization indicates that the ultimate source of insecurity for interlocutors is an “unfinished state” and “unfinished peace”.⁷⁴ It represents a form of both structural and symbolic violence as it is based on implicit classification and discrimination of people, separating of other ethnic groups and the creation of social hierarchies.

4. CONCLUSION

The paper has sought to highlight the interlinked factors behind the proliferation of SALW, deleterious interplay of various global and regional political, economic, cultural and spatial/geographical factors in four countries in the Western Balkans, and to explore how the confluence of factors sustaining widespread possession and misuse of small arms has reverberated on young people’s perception of (in)security.

The research demonstrates how most of the original factors enabling proliferation in the region during the 1990s are still present - in different contexts, modified forms and with uneven intensity – but affecting security provision. Versatile forms and locations of small arms related incidents, as well as different profiles of perpetrators reveal that misuse is still widespread in everyday’s life, beyond traditional criminal activities. However, if Human Security is understood not only as a critical tool and analytical construct but as mobilizing concept, the efforts have to be made to understand (in)security from the perspective of the people affected. Zooming on perceptions of small arms among high school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia, and youth activists in Bosnia, findings indicate interactions with small arms which reinforce social, economic and legal inequalities in a community. Additionally, the role of small arms in intimate relations is still prominent, rooted into the norms embedded in the context of traditional perceptions of masculinity, i.e. persistent gender stereotypes, representing symbolic violence.

Specifically in Bosnia and Herzegovina there is small arms possession, being officially legal on not, which is considered legitimate by interlocutors although it demonstrates either economic power or a power rooted in a person’s role in the wars. When seen from an individual perspective, the factors enabling proliferation are not just straightforward, nor based only on war legacy and “gun culture” understood as tradition of and affection for arms possession. There are multiple sources of human insecurity such as lack of rule of law and trust in institutions, corruption, the culture of violence and impunity, high economic inequality and the problems in establishing and maintain social cohesion. All these issues are reflected in arms possession, albeit the differential impacts on different groups of people. The dominant perceptions of young interlocutors are that they are living in both *unfinished states* and *unfinished peace*, which blur the lines between illegal and legal, legitimate and illegitimate, victims and perpetrators. Such insecurity perpetuates structural and symbolic violence by various segments of societies legitimizing necessity for small arms possession for different social and ethnic groups. It demonstrates contradiction of arms representing both source of security and insecurity within a same community, empowering some at the expense of others.

⁷⁴ “War is considered as normal, and peace as temporary, which is horrifying. Peace comes from a paper, not from the heart.” Tuzla, 9 September 2014.

All countries in the region have been involved in various arms control measures, and have passed national strategies for combating small arms and accompanying action plans in the context of integration to the European Union. However, focus on governmental structures and international regimes have not necessary provided linear improvement of perception of security locally. There is a need to address the complexity of dual role of arms and different impact on individuals and various social groups. It renders process by which illegal possession of arms is legitimized locally a key entry point for further exploration and mobilization of stakeholders for measures to improve human security in this sub-region.

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