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Review paper

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THE EU AND ARMS CONTROL: BUILDING CAPACITIES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS[1]

The paper examines the European Union's arms control policies, capabilities and infrastructure and determines the development of these policies and the relevant strategic and institutional infrastructure in the Western Balkans. It uses the nuclear pessimist approach to explain the theoretical underpinnings of the EU's approach to arms control and compare the Western Balkans stands in relation to the EU's. The authors present the EU policy toward the various arms control issues and examine the level of harmonisation of the Western Balkan states with the EU resolutions and strategies in the arms control area. Additionally, the authors present some of the EU institutional and educational infrastructure in the field of arms control and more detailed overview of the state of the discipline in the Western Balkans academic institutions. Authors conclude that most of the Western Balkans countries follow the EU examples in strategic and institutional field, but should work more on the improvement of diplomatic and educational architecture creating a real potential to become an arms control promoter as the only European region that still successfully implement sub-regional arms control regime.

Keywords: European Union; EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium; Western Balkans; arms control; conventional weapons; weapons of mass destruction

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of recorded human history, state power has often been asserted through warfare, as the victors determine the structure of the international order (Defarges 2007, in Lopandić 2010). The arms control regimes, particularly following the Cold War, demonstrated the crucial role in enabling the nuclear arms reduction, providing the predictability, reciprocity and verification. Given this, one might have expected that the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and the decline of communism in Europe would have signaled a reduction in the use of intimidation in international relations (Vukadinović 2006).

In *The End of History and the Last Man*, American political theorist Francis Fukuyama argued that liberal democracy could mark the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution" and the "final form of human government", signifying the "end of history" (Fukuyama 1992: xi). Although some states continued to search for the alternatives, and the paradigm is questioned even by the Fukuyama, the liberal-democratic order is still not replaced by a credible alternative. However, recent global events, such as the Russian-Ukrainian war (2022) and the Israeli-Palestinian war (2023), continues to pressure the established ideological order, but also the US hegemony and commitment to instruments that were part of that order, including the arms control regimes in Europe. Resurrection of nuclear threats revived the question such as: Will nuclear weapons be used by the great powers, potentially sparking the Third World War?

In accordance with mentioned, as the world enters in 2025, the geopolitical landscape is increasingly defined by a resurgence of tensions reminiscent of the Cold War era. Central part to this shift is the intensification of the global arms race, with three primary points of confrontation emerging: the first one is in the Pacific region, where growing tensions between the United States of America (USA) and People's Republic of China are reshaping regional dynamics. The second one is in Europe, where North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), in an indirect way, consistently highlights the escalating threat posed by Russia, through Ukrainian territory. The third one is of systemic character comprising the revived old arms rivalry between the USA and Russia. These developments signal a new chapter in global power struggles, characterized by military posturing and strategic realignments.

In this context, in March 2025 the European Commission announced the greater rearmament plan and dedicated a150 billion euro fund for priorities in conventional weapons (especially missile defence) and new technologies like drones. President

Ursula von der Leyen said in March 2025: "We are in an era of rearmament. And Europe is ready to massively boost its defence spending" (Strupczewski and Gray 2025). Is this a definite end of arms control regimes and endeavors in Europe for a foreseeable future? And how this affects the only functional arms control regime in Europe – the one in the Balkans. Is it keeping the peace in the Balkans or unfavorably constrain the military buildup in the region?

However, while announcing the further militarization of Europe in face of the Russian war in Ukraine and the second mandate of Donald Trump as the US president, the European Union (EU) continue to be committed to limitation and control of certain kinds of conventional weapons with inhumane effects and especially weapons of mass destruction (WMD) such as biological, chemical and nuclear weapons. In this domain it follows the pessimistic paradigm, supporting the non-proliferation norm and international institutions that constrain the spread of these kinds of weapons, especially within the United Nations framework, and posing strict export control regimes. Through technical, financial, and diplomatic support, the EU "promotes peace and protects its citizens by restricting the spread and use of weapons worldwide" (Official website of the European Union 2024). It also plays a significant role in enforcing international treaties that ban and/or restrict biological, chemical, nuclear, and conventional weapons (Ibidem). In this way the EU is linking preservation of peace with the restriction of spread and use of weapons.

This paper aims to examine the position of the Western Balkan (WB) states, which are all candidates for the EU membership, regarding the arms control, especially its level of harmonization with the EU's stand and policies. It concludes that the WB states follow the EU examples in strategic and institutional field, but should work on the improvement of diplomatic and educational architecture creating a real potential to become an arms control promoter as the only region that still successfully implement sub-regional arms control regime.

2. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE EU APPROACH TO THE NON-PROLIFERATION, ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

In the near future, arms control will become more important as the world enters a new round of systemic rivalry which could end up in general war, possible nuclear one, or creating mechanisms of rivalry control and at least minimum trust for which is the best mechanism arms control. Besides, new technologies and non-state actors

that emerge still demands the states to be committed to export controls, WMD non-proliferation and disarmament and strict safety measures. As a result, the scope of arms control will expand to include human security concerns and introduce new restrictions on previously accepted weapons. Therefore, the understanding of arms control will require grasping the balance between material and normative pressures in both domestic and international politics (Erickson 2018).With the military build-up and released from the strategic arms control constrains, the issues of stability arises, especially in the field of nuclear arms control.

There has been a significant theoretical debate surrounding nuclear proliferation and the threat of nuclear war. More specifically, in the book *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate* (1995)[2], Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz present a debate between two scholars on the implications of nuclear proliferation. Waltz argues that the spread of nuclear weapons could lead to greater global stability, as nuclear-armed states would be less likely to engage in war due to the fear of mutual destruction. In contrast, Sagan contends that nuclear proliferation increases the risks of accidents, miscalculations, and intentional use, particularly by less stable or less responsible states. The debate highlights differing views on the impact of nuclear weapons on international security and peace (Sagan and Waltz 1995). For this reason, the argument between optimism and pessimism is frequently referred to as "the Waltz-Sagan debate" (Knopf 2006: 42).

Therefore, in the article titled *Recasting the Proliferation Optimism-Pessimism Debate*, Jeffrey W. Knopf challenges the longstanding polarized debate on nuclear proliferation, offering a more nuanced understanding that goes beyond the binary views of optimism and pessimism. Historically, the debate has been split into two camps: proliferation optimists[3], who argue that more nuclear weapons enhance stability and peace, and proliferation pessimists[4], who warn that more states acquiring nuclear weapons increases the risk of war and instability. Knopf contends that both

[2] Their original essay, *The Perils of Proliferation: Organization Theory, Deterrence Theory, and the Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (1994), served as the basis for their later work – a book that includes revised versions of their writings along with arguments against each other.

[3] The nuclear proliferation debate has roots in the Cold War, where two opposing schools of thought emerged. Proliferation optimists, such as Kenneth Waltz, argue that nuclear weapons act as a stabilizing force by deterring war. The logic is that the catastrophic consequences of nuclear conflict make states reluctant to engage in direct military confrontations, as evidenced by the USA and the Soviet Union avoiding war despite their ideological differences during the Cold War.

[4] In contrast, proliferation pessimists emphasize the dangers of nuclear weapons spread. They highlight risks such as the potential for nuclear arms races, accidental nuclear wars, and the spread of nuclear technology to unstable or rogue states. Pessimists argue that more states possessing nuclear weapons could lead to miscalculations, regional instability, or even deliberate use of nuclear weapons, increasing the risk of global conflict.

of these perspectives oversimplify the complexities surrounding nuclear proliferation and calls for a more nuanced, contextual approach that bridges the divide between optimism and pessimism. However, Knopf critiques both camps for their deterministic outlooks, arguing that neither optimism nor pessimism provides a comprehensive or universally applicable explanation of nuclear proliferation. He asserts that the consequences of nuclear weapons spread are not predetermined, but rather depend heavily on the specific context in which proliferation occurs. Knopf[5] suggests that policymakers and analysts must move beyond simplistic labels of optimism or pessimism and instead assess each case individually, taking into account a variety of contextual factors (Knopf 2006).

3. THE EU POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD OF NON-PROLIFERATION, ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

3.1. The key EU strategic documents in the field of non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament

The EU is a *sui generis* organization with supranational characteristics that gathers the democratic countries in Europe, whose partnership is based on common values. Also, the EU often acts as a strategic entity with a distinct and independent security, defense and foreign policy, especially when it is compared to other major actors, such as the Russia and the USA. Hence, it shares a collective identity, primarily with democratic nations (its allies), and plays a significant role in Euro-Atlantic security. However, it is not a military alliance itself, but most of its member states participate in NATO.

Historically speaking, the EU's non-proliferation policy originated from concerns about the potential weaponization of nuclear energy programs in defeated states after the Second World War (1945), particularly the risk of Germany developing nuclear

[5] Knopf argues that the effects of nuclear proliferation on international security are complex and depend on several factors, such as the political regime type (democratic or authoritarian), regional security dynamics, and internal political stability. While nuclear deterrence may work in stable regions with established diplomacy, it could escalate tensions in areas with unresolved disputes, like the Middle East or South Asia. Knopf stresses that there is no universal solution, as the context matters greatly. He also highlights the importance of international norms, institutions like the United Nations (UN) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and arms control treaties in regulating nuclear proliferation. Finally, he notes that the actions of major nuclear powers, like the USA and Russia, can influence global nuclear behavior, particularly through disarmament initiatives.

weapons (Grip n.d.). This fear now extends to other nuclear programs, most notably Iran's civilian nuclear ambitions, which have become a significant challenge for the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).The EU's non-proliferation efforts are based on two key beliefs. Firstly, that preventing WMD proliferation promotes stability and security, contributing to a peaceful global environment through institutional constraints on state behavior (Council Common Position 2003/805/CFSP 2003). Secondly, the EU is particularly concerned about WMD falling into the hands of autocratic or dictatorial regimes, which are viewed as irresponsible in maintaining global peace. This concern is reflected in the EU's differing approaches to WMD programs in India, North Korea and Iran, where regional power imbalances and security threats are also at play (Kostić 2021).

Once the EU adopted and consolidated its core beliefs on non-proliferation, along with its acceptance of the established European order and the existing nuclear weapons framework, it was able to define itself as a global non-proliferator. This identity became central to the external aspects of the EU's CSDP and CFSP. By advocating for non-proliferation globally, the EU not only reinforces its role on the world stage, but also protects its own identity, stability, and integrity (values that can only be upheld in a world that commits to the non-proliferation principle). Thus, non-proliferation is viewed as crucial for both the peace and security of Europe and the continued existence of the EU in its current form (Ibidem, 140). However, the EU is not acting in isolation, and the break-up of non-proliferation regime might lead it to opposite direction, thus proving that international norms must preserve a minimum of respect and reciprocity in order to contribute its purpose of maintaining stability through predictability.

The events of September 11, 2001, amplified fears about terrorism and proliferation, expanding the scope of the EU's non-proliferation policy to include non-state actors. The USA, a key EU ally, had already been deeply affected by the attacks and was involved in counter-proliferation efforts, which encouraged the EU to reinforce its own strategy. This led to the adoption of the *European Security Strategy* (ESS)[6]

[6] The ESS, adopted in 2003, represents a cornerstone of the EU's approach to addressing contemporary security challenges. The strategy was developed in the context of a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape, marked by the end of the Cold War, the emergence of new threats, and the evolving role of the EU in global affairs. The ESS outlines the EU's primary security concerns and establishes a framework for its external actions, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive, multilateral approach to security. In that manner, the ESS reflects the EU's commitment to peace and stability in Europe and the wider world. As the global security landscape continues to evolve, the EU remains committed to strengthening its role in maintaining international peace, enhancing its capabilities, and fostering a more secure and cooperative world order (For more information see: European Security Strategy 2003; European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in a Better World 2009).

and the *EU Strategy against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction* (WMD Strategy)[7] in 2003 (Kostić 2021).

As time went on, the EU produced numerous documents that addressed security concerns through non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament principles such as the *EU Strategy to Combat the Illicit Accumulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and Their Ammunition* (EU Council 2006), the *EU Global Strategy* (2016), the *EU Strategy against illicit firearms, small arms and light weapons and their ammunition "Securing arms, protecting citizens"*(2018) and *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* (European External Action Service 2022), which is a comprehensive framework developed by the EU to guide its security and defense policies over the coming decade.

3.2. The EU institutional and educational infrastructure

The debate over the CFSP started during the *Maastricht Treaty* discussions (1992), with differing views between Germany, France and Britain on defense policy. Eventually, a policy was agreed upon, aiming for long-term cooperation in foreign and security matters. The goal of CFSP is to protect EU values, promote peace, and strengthen security and support democracy and human rights. Member states cooperate to define common positions and take joint actions, requiring unanimous decisions for major actions, though some decisions can be made by a qualified majority (Gabet 2016).

There were difficulties in implementing the CFSP in the early years, especially in responding to crises like the Yugoslav war, where the role of EU was largely diplomatic. Despite setbacks, the EU is engaged in global diplomacy, particularly with countries that are applying for EU membership, and developing partnerships with former USSR republics, and regional organizations in other parts of the world (Ibidem).

The 2002 study is a key document for non-proliferation and disarmament education (UN RevCon Final document 2010), while the UN Agenda for Disarmament "Securing our Common Future" (2018) highlights the importance of disarmament

[7] The WMD Strategy, adopted in 2003, is a pivotal document that outlines the EU's strategic approach to addressing security challenges. It was developed in response to evolving global threats and aimed at strengthening the EU's role in maintaining peace and stability both within and beyond its borders. One of the most significant elements of the WDM Strategy is its identification of the proliferation of WMD as a key security threat to the EU and its member states. (For more information see: The EU strategy against proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction 2003).

education, connecting it to the sustainable development goals (UNODA 2018). Also, the second recommendation of the 2002 study urges UN offices and other international organizations (based in Europe "with mandate to educate") to create and share educational material on disarmament and non-proliferation. Focusing on that matter, the key organizations are: the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), the UN Information Service, the OPCW, the IAEA, the CTBTO and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (I-Mi Suh 2020: 3-4).

In July 2010, the European Council (EC) established Decision 2010/430/CFSP to create a network of independent non-proliferation think tanks aimed at supporting the EU's strategy to combat the proliferation of WMD. The technical implementation of this initiative was entrusted to the EU Non-Proliferation Consortium which was the first title of the Consortium and after 2018 Council Decision it was renamed to EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium (EUNPDC). This Consortium now consists of six major European institutes: the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), la Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique (FRS), the International Institute for Strategic Studies – Europe (IISS-Europe), the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (HSFK/PRIF), International Affairs Institute in Rome (IAI) and the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP) (EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium 2025a). This network was designed to foster dialogue among foreign policy institutions and research centers across the EU, focusing on long-term discussions and measures to prevent WMD proliferation. As of January 2025, there are 113 EUNPDC Network members (European non-proliferation and disarmament think-tanks) from all EU countries, some EU candidate countries (Turkey, Serbia, Ukraine and Georgia), and other non-EU countries (UK, Norway and Switzerland) (EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium 2025b).

3.3. The EU and WMD

The EU can be considered a nuclear pessimist. It also places the prevention of any WMD use and proliferation as its highest priorities. In the 1990s the EU was focused on the prevention of WMD proliferation on states, while at the beginning of the 2000s the focus widened in order to include the non-state actors. However, since 2014 and the Crimea crisis, the emphasis has returned to the proliferation issue involving state actors. Factors such as the increasing risk of nuclear weapons being used in regional conflicts, worsened relations with Russia, the collapse of arms control agreements in

Europe, and the potential vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons by China, as well as challenges related to the modernization of nuclear arsenals by all nuclear-armed states, have contributed to this shift (Stefanović and Kostić 2024). Additionally, the failure of the USA-North Korea denuclearization talks during the first Trump term in office and the USA withdrawal from the 2018 Iran nuclear deal, further emphasized the threat posed by state actors. However, this shift in focus is more complex, as some countries still sponsor terrorism, where the two types of WMD threats intersect. For instance, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, and Syria are currently listed by the US State Department as state sponsors of terrorism (Kostić 2021).

Since France joined the NPT in 1992, the principle of non-proliferation was embraced by all EU member countries, leading to a consensus within the EU. This shows the significance of security environment for the non-proliferation policy of one country. As a result, the EU has started to view the WMD threat as external, with its focus shifting away from nuclear weapons programs within the EU to concerns about nuclear weapons proliferation outside the EU (Grip n.d.). The 2003 Council's Common Position on strengthening and expanding multilateral agreements for the non-proliferation of WMD and delivery systems acknowledged the growing threat of WMD proliferation, particularly the risk of terrorists acquiring chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear materials (Council Common Position 2003/805/CFSP). The 2003 ESS identified WMD proliferation as a major security threat to the EU (European Commission 2003). However, the 2008 ESS Implementation Report placed the proliferation of WMD by states as the top priority among global security challenges, ahead of terrorism and organized crime. It highlighted concerns about Libya, Iran, and North Korea, and noted the potential revival of civil nuclear power as a challenge to the non-proliferation system without proper safeguards. The report emphasized that an Iranian nuclear military capability would pose an unacceptable threat to EU security (EU Council 2008b).

In 2008, alongside the ESS Report, the EU adopted new guidelines that stressed the growing threat posed by WMD proliferation, noting that both states and non-state actors (including terrorists) possessing such weapons would present significant security challenges. The document also recognized the role of accelerated trade and globalization in facilitating WMD proliferation, making certain countries, private actors and illicit networks more likely to acquire these weapons (EU Council 2008a).

The rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2015 and the issue of foreign terrorist fighters posed significant threats to European security. In recent years, there has been an increased focus on securing critical infrastructure and strengthening the link between non-proliferation and counterterrorism efforts. This connection has

led to measures aimed at reducing chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear risks within EU policies and institutions. The growing threat of WMD terrorism has expanded the definition of "weapons", considering the potential use of improvised explosive devices combining radioactive material and conventional explosives. As a result, controlling dual-use technologies and materials has become a key focus (Kostić 2021).

In 2016, the *EU Global Strategy* acknowledged that the spread of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems continues to be an increasing threat to Europe and the broader world (European External Action Service 2016: 41). However, the 2019 Report on the Global Strategy (EEAS 2019: 8) does not specifically refer to the WMD threat. Instead, it highlights that "non-proliferation and arms control are strategically at risk" recognizing that the collapse of international regimes represents a new primary threat in the context of revived great power competition (Kostić 2021: 145).

In accordance with all mentioned, the EU played a pivotal role in advancing global security through a comprehensive strategy aimed at preventing the proliferation of WMDs, managing existing weapon stockpiles and advocating for disarmament, all supported by its dedication to multilateralism and international law. As a result, the EU's non-proliferation policy is a cornerstone of its security and foreign policies, for which to endure a proper reciprocity of other actors must be accomplished. Thus, the EU strongly opposes the spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and has established a wide array of tools to tackle this global issue. The EU supports the enforcement of key international treaties such as the *Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty* (NPT), *Biological Weapons Convention* (BWC), *Chemical Weapons Convention* (CWC), and *Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty* (CTBT). However, there is no common position on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapon (TPNW), since only three EU member states (the neutrals) ratified the Treaty.

The EU's strategy combines diplomacy, the use of economic sanctions, and collaboration with international bodies like the IAEA and OPCW. The EU's non-proliferation policy includes its commitment to export controls, enforcing strict regulations on the trade of materials and technologies that could be used in the development of WMDs. In addition, the EU has fostered partnerships with countries in key regions to prevent the illegal spread of WMD-related materials. Also, it is important to underline the EU's significant role in forging international agreements designed to prevent nuclear proliferation. For instance, the EU has been a major supporter of the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action* (JCPOA)[8] with Iran, which aimed to restrict nu-

[8] The comprehensive nuclear agreement between Iran and the P5+1 (the UK, Germany, France, China, Russia, and the USA) was finalized in July 2015 and implemented in January 2016. It was believed that it effectively

clear activities of Iran, in exchange for sanctions relief. This diplomatic initiative demonstrates the EU's conviction that multilateral agreements are the most effective tool in addressing the risks associated with WMD proliferation.

Therefore, the EU is dedicated to promoting a rules-based international order - a global system grounded in international law, including the core principles of the *UN Charter*, which uphold peace, human rights, sustainable development and equitable access to global resources. The EU aims to strengthen the UN as the foundation of a rules-based multilateral order and work toward globally coordinated solutions with international and regional organizations, governments, and non-state actors (European External Action Service 2016).

3.4. The EU and Conventional Weapons

The conventional arms control in Europe was part of the results of the US-Soviet Union settlements of ending the Cold War, and a "victim" of the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union, that changed the balance of power on which these regimes rested. The EU member states are part of these agreements, but the security landscape was significantly changed with the NATO enlargement and the membership of the former Warsaw Pact members in NATO. This set of conventional arms control regime and confidence and security building measures in Europe included the *Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty* (CFE), the *Open Skies Treaty* (OST), and the *Vienna Document* (Kostić Šulejić 2024). The first two treaties are no longer functional due to suspensions or withdrawals, while the Vienna Document could not be updated due to the West-Russia disagreements.

On the other hand, the EU is a great promoter of multilateral agreements such as the *Arms Trade Treaty* (ATT), which establishes international standards for the trade of conventional weapons, aiming to reduce the illicit arms trade, human suffering, and promote regional security, stability, accountability and transparency among state parties. It does not restrict the types or quantities of arms that states can buy, sell or possess, nor does it affect domestic gun control laws (The Arms Trade Treaty at a Glance 2025).

The EU has been a strong advocate of the ATT. The Treaty is particularly relevant to the EU's foreign policy, as it aligns with the Union's commitment to promoting

blocks Iran's nuclear weapons development, closely monitors its nuclear activities, and encourages Iran to maintain a peaceful nuclear program. While some limits phase out over time, key provisions, such as intrusive monitoring and restrictions on weaponization-related activities, are permanent (The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action: An Effective, Verifiable Nuclear Deal 2021). The USA withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018.

peace, stability and human rights in its external relations. By implementing robust export controls, the EU seeks to prevent the misuse of conventional arms and promote global peace and security (The European Union and the Arms Trade Treaty 2025).

The EU is also a great supporter of the 1997 *Ottawa Convention*, formally known as the *Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty*, which bans the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel landmines. The Treaty has led to a significant reduction in landmine production and deployment, with over 40 million stockpiled mines destroyed. Efforts under the treaty have helped clear mined areas, assisted survivors, and decreased landmine-related casualties (Anti-Personnel Landmines Convention 2025).

In contrast, while the EU has made significant strides regarding anti-personnel mines, the situation is more complex concerning cluster munitions. Not all EU member states are parties to the *Convention on Cluster Munitions* (CCM), which was adopted in 2008. This Treaty aims to prohibit the use, production and transfer of cluster munitions and requires the destruction of stockpiles and the clearance of affected areas. The European Commission continues to promote the universalization of the Convention, working towards a future where both anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions are eliminated from the global landscape (Human Rights Watch 2024).

Regarding the small arms and light weapons (SALW), which cause more global casualties (European Union Strategy on Small Arms and Light Weapons 2008) than any other type of weapon and have a detrimental effect on the social and economic development of states, the EU is also active in its control and limitation. Reducing the illicit trade in these weapons is crucial for preventing crises and fostering peace worldwide. Since 2001, states have worked together under the UN Programme of Action to combat the illegal spread of SALW and their ammunition (Federal Ministry of the Republic of Austria, European and International Affairs n.d.). The EU also adopted an action plan on firearms trafficking 2020-2025.

Also, the EU is great supporter of the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and in 2021 it adopted Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/1694 in support of the universalization, implementation and strengthening of the Convention (UNODA 2025). It also considers the CCW to be an appropriate framework for dealing with the EDTs, especially the lethal autonomous weapons systems (EEAS 2024).

The illegal production, transfer, and circulation of SALW, along with their excessive accumulation and uncontrolled spread, are key factors in four of the five security challenges outlined in the European Strategy. SALW contribute to terrorism, organ-

ized crime, and are significant in igniting and escalating conflicts, as well as in the breakdown of state institutions. These issues pose a security threat to all. As a result, the EU has committed to actively tackling this problem through its *SALW Strategy* (European Union Strategy on Small Arms and Light Weapons 2008).

3.5. The EU and EDTs

In order to properly define a new and disruptive technology, one should start with the phrase "emerging and disruptive technologies (EDTs)" (Jevtić and Kostić2023). Of course, we are referring to new technologies – those that are emerging and developing. Thus, EDTs have the potential to revolutionize warfare, and the EU has recognized their importance, dedicating substantial funds and launching initiatives for research and development (R&D). However, keeping up with global powers like Russia, China, and the USA poses a significant challenge. On the other hand, more precisely, in the defense sector, EDTs can lead to radical changes, with technologies like quantum-based systems, artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, hypersonic weapons, and space technologies. The EU's efforts are modest compared to the USA, which invests significantly more in defense innovation. China and Russia are also actively developing EDTs, with China aiming to dominate in the field, particularly in AI and hypersonic weapons. Russia has already deployed and used hypersonic missiles in combat, and continues to prioritize EDT development despite the impact of sanctions (Clapp 2022).

In the article *One Step Back, Two Steps Forward: The EU, NATO, and Emerging and Disruptive Technologies* (2023), Antonio Calcara discusses the growing importance of EDTs in defense and security. He highlights the challenges faced by the EU in keeping up with global competitors like the USA, Russia and China in EDT development, particularly in areas such as AI, quantum technologies, hypersonic weapons and robotics. Calcara notes that the EU has recognized the potential of EDTs and it has initiated various programs to boost innovation, such as: the European Defence Fund (EDF), the European Defence Innovation Scheme and collaboration through Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO 2025). However, despite these efforts, the EU's defense R&D investment still lags behind the USA, which leads in military innovation spending (Calcara 2023). Because of all mentioned, the European Parliament stresses the need for international regulation on AI-enabled weapons and autonomous systems, emphasizing EU leadership in establishing a regulatory framework for these technologies. In that manner, the EU aims to foster synergies between

civilian and defense innovation to stay competitive in the rapidly evolving EDT landscape (Clapp 2022: 1-2).

This article emphasizes the importance of EU-NATO cooperation in advancing EDT development, as both organizations strive to maintain technological leadership in the world. Therefore, NATO has launched initiatives like the Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA)[9] to enhance innovation. However, the EU stays committed to development of institutional framework that would guide the use of new and potentially disruptive technologies.

4. THE WESTERN BALKANS STATES POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD OF NON-PROLIFERATION, ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

Initially, the term Western Balkans referred to five Balkan countries: Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (later Serbia and Montenegro), the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (later North Macedonia), and Albania, which were all promised the possible EU membership in 2003 (Đukanović 2020). After the Unilateral Declaration of Independence of Kosovo (here used as Kosovo*[10]) in 2008 and Croatian membership in the EU in 2013, the term evolved to refer to the remaining former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's republics outside the EU plus Albania. The Western Balkans region, with its history of political tensions, ethnic divisions, and conflict, continues to face significant challenges on its path to peace and stability, but has still functioning sub-regional regime that constrains arms race and keeps at least a minimum of confidence. Although the member states occupy the most important role the regime is supported by various regional international organizations such as Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), RACVIAC-Centre for Security Cooperation and Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) which involves other participants, including the EU, as well. Also, the EU is working bilaterally with the Western Balkan countries to help local authorities curb

[9] It is an organization created by NATO to identify and boost dual-use innovation capabilities throughout the Alliance (DIANA 2025).

[10] Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008 and it has been recognized by over 100 countries, including the USA and a majority of EU member states. However, it is not universally recognized as a sovereign state. Agreed formula for the representation of Kosovo is "Kosovo*", where "*" means "This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence".

the illegal arms trade, reduce military stockpiles, and encourage regional cooperation on security matters.

The WB countries aim to enhance international cooperation by aligning with the foreign and security policy of EU, NATO standards, and UNSC resolutions. They seek to establish a legal framework for implementing international sanctions based on *UN Charter* Chapter VII (Actions with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression) (Charter of the United Nations and Statue of the International Court of Justice 1945), supported by the EU, OSCE, and other organizations, with the aim to contribute global peace and security.

4.1. Strategic framework of the Western Balkans countries regarding the WMD

Albania supports the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1540, which aims to prevent the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and their delivery systems. Recognizing the serious threat posed by terrorists or non-state actors acquiring WMDs, Albania views Resolution 1540 as a crucial tool for guiding countries in preventing such threats. Albania has developed a *National Strategy and Action Plan* to combat WMD proliferation and actively contributes to regional security in this area (Speech of the Albanian Deputy Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs 2021: 1-2).

The Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Preventing the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (2018-2022) demonstrates its commitment to enhancing its capacity and improving coordination among institutions to combat the spread of WMDs. The Strategy aligns with Bosnia and Herzegovina's Security Policy and anti-terrorism priorities. It recognizes the growing threat of WMD proliferation, especially in the hands of terrorists or criminal groups. Because of that, the Strategy calls for a comprehensive and coordinated national response, but also and international involvement through their cooperation. Bosnia and Herzegovina defines WMDs as chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons, along with their delivery systems, in line with international agreements (Ministarstvo vanjskih poslova Bosne i Hercegovine 2018).

Assembly of Kosovo implements the *Law on the trade of strategic goods*. This law regulates, between other questions, the nonproliferation of WMD, and other strategic goods used for military purposes, and to contribute the international and regional efforts to regulate the trade of strategic goods" (Assembly of Kosovo 2013).

The *National Strategy for the Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction for period 2016-2020* (*Strategija za neproliferaciju oružja za masovno uništenje za*

period 2016-2020) sets the framework and guidelines for Montenegro's efforts to prevent and combat the spread of such weapons. It outlines the coordination of activities at the national level, involving government bodies, the civil sector, and industry, and emphasizes cooperation with other countries and international organizations. The Strategy also serves as a platform for preparing Montenegro to respond to chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear threats. In that way, Montenegro defines WMD as chemical, biological, nuclear, and radiological weapons and their means of transfer, as outlined in international treaties, conventions, agreements, and protocols. Hence, the overall goal of this Strategy is to prevent Montenegro from participating in the proliferation of WMD (Strategija za neproliferaciju oružja za masovno uništenje za period 2016-2020, 2016).

A modern and relevant defense policy is crucial for protecting the essential interests of the Republic of North Macedonia, as outlined in its *Defence Strategy of the Republic of North Macedonia* (Ministry of Defence, Republic of North Macedonia 2020). This policy includes a range of measures designed to prepare the defense system to effectively address both current and future threats, risks, and challenges. The defense system of the Republic of North Macedonia is focusing on building response capabilities to handle various situations, including warfare, cyber and hybrid threats, crises, terrorism, actions by foreign and non-state actors, and the trafficking of conventional weapons, WMDs, and nuclear technology (Ministry of Defence, Republic of North Macedonia 2020).

The Strategy for Combating the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (2020) of Serbia (Strategija za borbu protiv širenja oružja za masovno uništenje za period od 2021. do 2025. godine) outlines the general framework and guidelines for Serbia's actions to prevent and counter the spread of WMD. It states that the Republic of Serbia is committed to ensuring national security and active contribution to regional stability. Also, it participates in international initiatives with the aim to preserve global security and prevent the proliferation of WMD. Serbia defines WMD as chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons, and their means of transfer, as defined by international conventions, agreements, and protocols (Vlada Republike Srbije 2020).

4.2. The WB states institutional and educational infrastructure in the field of non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament

The WB states have a modest institutional and educational infrastructure in the field of NACD. However, all of these countries have arms control units in their ministries of foreign affairs and faculties/universities offering programs/courses or subjects that involve theme, but in majority of cases not separately.

In Albania, the College of Europe offers an accredited Master of Arts study program in EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies. In the first semester, the program includes a course on EU Foreign and Security Policy. In the second semester, students must choose four optional courses, one of which is EU and Peace Mediation, which falls under Cluster 4: Specific Professional Skills (College of Europe 2025).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, at the Faculty of Law, University of Tuzla in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bachelor third-year students study professional subjects such as Social Security Law and Sociology of Genocide. In the fourth year, they can choose the professional elective course Terrorism and International Security (Pravni fakultet Univerziteta u Tuzli n.d.). Then, Security and Peace Studies, (Bachelor) study program, at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University in Sarajevo (Fakultet političkih nauka Univerziteta u Sarajevu 2025) has accredited subjects such as: Introduction to Security and Defense Studies; Security System of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Management and Implementation of Safety Systems; Leadership in Security and Defense; Environmental Security; Law of Security and Defense; Planning in the Security Sector; European Security and Safety Policy; International Security; Contemporary Security Threats; Civil Protection; Security and Media in Democratic Societies; Peace and Humanitarian Operations; Internal Security; History of Wars, etc. (Sigurnosne i mirovne studije 2025). Most importantly, the master studies at the FPN UNSA has the separate subject on Proliferation and Disarmament Policies.

In Kosovo, at the UBT College, in the Security Studies program, first-year students take subjects such as: Introduction to Security Studies and National Security and Strategy. In the second year, students study subjects like: International Security; Introduction to Cyber Security; Peace and Conflicts: Theory and Practice; Media – Propaganda and Security; Technology and Terrorism; Security and Diplomatic Negotiations, and Energy and Security. Elective subjects include National Security Strategy; Non-state Actors in Security, and Weapons of Mass Destruction and Non-Proliferation. In the third year, there are two study programs, one of which focuses on National Security and Civil Emergencies. This program includes subjects such as:

Security of Critical National Infrastructure and National Defense and the Armed Forces (UBT College 2025a). Also, at the UBT College, the accredited Political Science Bachelor's program offers a concentration in International Relations in the third year. This concentration includes subjects such as International Security, along with elective courses like Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies (UBT College 2025b).

In Montenegro, at the Faculty of Law, University of Montenegro, the Bachelor's study program in Security and Criminalistics includes the following subjects: Security and Human Rights, National Security, Security Work Research Methodology, Security Systems, Security Management, and Criminalistics IV: Strategy (Pravni fakultet Univerziteta Crne Gore n.d.). Also, the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Montenegro, has a study program on Politicology and International Relations, which offers subjects such as Contemporary International Relations, Globalization, Euro-Atlantic Integration, Introduction to Security Studies and Foreign Policy of EU (Fakultet političkih nauka Univerziteta Crne Gore 2025).

Furthermore, at the Humanistic Studies, University of Donja Gorica, at the second year of Bachelor's study program in Security, includes the following courses, such as: International Security, National Security, and Modern Terrorism. In the third year, program includes: Security Strategies, Crisis Management, Defense Policies, Global Security, and Cyber Crime (Humanističke studije Univerziteta Donja Gorica n.d.c).

At the Humanistic Studies, the specialist studies program (7th and 8th semester) offers a concentration in International and National Security. The program includes subjects/courses such as: Cyber Security, Contemporary Security and Intelligence Systems, Contemporary Security Policies, Security Culture, Research on War and Peace in the World, and Regional Security (Humanističke studije Univerziteta Donja Gorica n.d.a). Also, the Master program, which lasts for two years, includes a study program in International Security, with a subject such as International and National Security (Humanističke studije Univerziteta Donja Gorica n.d.b).

In North Macedonia, the undergraduate study program Security, Defense, and Peace is offered at the Faculty of Philosophy, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje (The Faculty of Philosophy Ss. Cyril and Methodius 2025). Additionally, there are graduate study programs in Security, Defense, and Peace, which include subjects such as: Security, International Security, National Security, Intelligence, Terrorism Threat Management, Security Management, Corporate Security, Strategic and Defense Studies, International Relations and Diplomacy, Crisis Management, Defense

Resource Management, Defense Policy and Strategy, Peace, Peace Policies and Globalization, and Peace and Conflict (Graduate study programs 2025).

In Serbia, the University of Belgrade offers various programs related to security and peace studies through its Faculty of Security and Faculty of Political Sciences. At the Faculty of Security, the curriculum is structured to provide a comprehensive education on security, crisis management, and risk management. First year focuses on fundamental concepts such as Conflict Theories, Security Risks, and Disasters. During second year, students have subjects like: the Legal Foundations of Security, Ecological Security, Introduction to Security Studies, and an in-depth study of Security Systems, Defense Systems, Risk Management, and Security Management. Key subjects at the third year include Crisis Management and Civil Protection, with the aim to prepare students for real-world challenges in crisis situations. And, fourth year focuses on specialized areas like: the Civil Defense System, Civil-Military Relations, and the National Security System of Serbia. Students can choose from a variety of optional subjects in areas such as: National Security, Corporate Security, Emergency Situations and Environmental Security, and Strategic Security (Fakultet bezbednosti Univerziteta u Beogradu 2025). At the same University (of Belgrade), more precisely, at the Faculty of Political Sciences, the Master program in Peace, Security, and Development offers advanced studies, likely focusing on conflict resolution, global security issues, and strategies for promoting peace and sustainable development. These programs are designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary for careers in security, crisis management, and related fields (Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade n.d.). However, there is not a specific subject dealing with arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament.

4.3. The alignment of WB states with the EU policy on non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament

The countries of the Western Balkans, as a part of the broader international community, have made significant strides in aligning their policies with international norms and give a contribution in global efforts to reduce the threats posed by WMD and conventional arms. In these areas, the efforts of the WB region are deeply intertwined with its aspirations for European integration, which encourages alignment with Western European standards and its international treaties.

In accordance with the mentioned, the WB region generally shows strong commitment to global NACD efforts, with notable participation in major treaties like the

NPT, BWC, CWC, CTBT, ATT the Mine Ban Treaty, Convention on Cluster Munition and LTBT. However, due to status as a partially recognized entity, Kosovo is excluded from all of these international agreements and is not part of sub-regional arms control regime (Jevtić and Kostić Šulejić 2023). Additionally, WB countries are not part of the CFE, but remain part of the sub-regional arms control agreement (which involves Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro), which is modeled according to the CFE, and only Bosnia and Herzegovina is part of OST. The region's approach to these treaties reflects its complex geopolitical dynamics and efforts to integrate into broader international frameworks, while maintaining security and defense priorities (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participation of the WB countries in NACD

Treaty's name	**Date**		**Albania**	**BH**	**Kosovo***	**RNM**	**MNE**	**RS**
	Opened for signature	**Entry into force**						
LTBT	5.8.1963.	10.10.1963.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
NPT	1.7.1968.	5.3.1970.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
BWC	10.4.1972.	16.3.1975.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
CWC	13.1.1993.	29.4.1997.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
CTBT	24.9.1996.	pending	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sub-regional arms control agreement	14.6.1996.	14.6.1996.	No	Yes	No*	No	Yes	Yes
OST	24.3.1992.	1.1.2002.	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
ATT	3.6.2013.	24.1.2014.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mine Ban Treaty	3.12.1997.	1.3.1999.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Conv. on Cluster Munition	3.12.2008.	1.8.2010.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
CCW	10.4.1981.	2.12.1983.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: Table is made by authors

Not applicable after 1999, although Kosovo has largely developed armed forces

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), that entered into force in 2021, bans all nuclear weapon activities, including development, testing, production, and use. It also prohibits deploying nuclear weapons on national territory and assisting others in such activities. States parties must prevent prohibited actions, support victims of nuclear weapons, and remediate contaminated environments. As of January 2025, this Treaty has 94 signatories and 73 member states, but none of them from the Western Balkans, although a Serbia might be a good candidate for signing

this treaty, having in mind that all military neutral countries of the EU adopted the Treaty (Stefanović and Kostić 2024).

Also, the WB countries have continued its alignment patterns with the CFSP in 2024 – with only Serbia aligning around 50% and the others around 100%. The EU and its member countries carefully track alignment with the matters that impact the Union's global standing, interests, and stated foreign policy goals. Between January 1 and June 30, 2024, the EU has made 57 statements urging candidate and partner countries to align with – see Table 2 (Novaković and Plavšić 2024).

Table 2: The WB countries: its alignment patterns with the CFSP in the first part of 2024

	Albania	**Bosnia and Herzegovina**	**Montenegro**	**North Macedonia**	**Serbia**
Yes	57	57	57	57	27
No	0	0	0	0	30
Alignment percentage	100%	100%	100%	100%	47%

Source: Novaković and Plavšić (2024)

In Table 2, based on the provided data, it appears that 5 countries in the Western Balkans are being evaluated for alignment on the CFSP. The data suggests that Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and North Macedonia are fully aligned, with a 100% alignment percentage. However, Serbia stands out with only 47% alignment. This indicates a significant difference in perspective or stance compared to the other countries in the region, as only half of the respondents or subjects in Serbia appear to be aligned, while the other half does not share the same view, due to its close connection with Russia, even after the war in Ukraine started on February 2022 (Ibidem).

Regarding the Iranian question, in the first part of 2024 the EU has issued four declarations: *Iran: Statement by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the bombing in the city of Kerma*, dated on 4. 1. 2024 – adopted by all WB countries*; Iran: Statement by the High Representative on behalf of the EU*, dated on 14. 4. 2024 – adopted by all WB countries, except Serbia; *Statement by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the alignment of certain countries with Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/1019 concerning restrictive measures directed against certain persons and entities in view of the situation in Iran* dated on 24. 4. 2024 – adopted by all WB countries, except Serbia; *Iran: The High Representative issued a statement on behalf*

of the EU on alignment of certain third countries concerning restrictive measures dated on 17. 6. 2024 – adopted by all WB countries except Serbia (Ibidem). However, the position of Serbia should not be considered as taking sides in conflicts or quitting up the EU membership, but as a result of its negative stance on the restrictive measures as such due to its history and experience.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to examine the EU policy on non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament and to determine the position and level of harmonization of Western Balkan states with the EU stances. It reconsidered the EU strategic framework in the field of NACD, including on WMD, conventional weapons and emerging and disruptive technologies, the institutional and some of the educational infrastructure, as well as those of the Western Balkan states. The great disturbance of the balance of power in Europe, in relation to the one that existed at the time of creation of arms control regimes during the end of the Cold War caused the restricted functionality of these regimes. However, the one in the Balkans endured and continued to provide for the stability of the region, which is still not in the status of security community, but rather shaken with new geopolitical tensions.

The EU promotes the non-proliferation and arms control, including in the region, although it now faces new security challenges. Militarization only cause new militarization, pushing the Europe in a new arms race with Russia, risking also the nuclear weapons build-up. As a nuclear pessimist paradigm predicts, the more nuclear weapons can only cause more instability and a possibility that nuclear weapons might be used. On the other side, there are numerus examples, first of all the Cuban missile crises and the Euromissile crises, when the escalation led to arms control efforts and results. But, can that work at all times for all escalation crises or it was just a luck that we did not end up in nuclear catastrophe?

The EU strongly supports the UN-led multilateral NACD arrangements and instruments and is on its own leading some of diplomatic efforts, such as in the case of Iran. It also supports regional initiatives and organizations that includes the arms control issues and supports the preservation of sub-regional arms control agreement. However, challenges remain in ensuring the sustainability of these efforts and fully integrating the WB into European security structures.

The Western Balkans countries are part of multilateral NACD agreements and in most cases follow the EU policies, strategies and decisions, since they are a candidates

for the EU membership. Only in case of Serbia, the alignment is around 50% mostly because of the negative stance of Serbia regarding the restrictive measures and their effects and effectiveness to achieve desirable aims. Although the strategic and institutional framework of the Western Balkans states is mostly harmonized with that of the EU, the greater improvement might still be made in the diplomatic efforts regarding the arms control and the educational infrastructure on NACD.

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EU I KONTROLA NAORUŽANJA: IZGRADNJA SPOSOBNOSTI NA ZAPADNOM BALKANU

Sažetak:

U radu se istražuju politike, sposobnosti i infrastruktura Evropske unije u oblasti kontrole naoružanja i utvrđuje razvoj ovih politika i relevantne strateške i institucionalne infrastrukture na Zapadnom Balkanu. Koristi se teorijski pristup nuklearnog pesimizma, kako bi se objasnile teorijske postavke odnosa EU prema kontroli naoružanja, a zatim se i upoređuju stavovi država Zapadnog Balkana u odnosu na EU. Autorice predstavljaju politiku EU prema različitim pitanjima kontrole naoružanja i ispituju stepen usklađenosti država Zapadnog Balkana sa rezolucijama i strategijama EU u oblasti kontrole naoružanja. Pored toga, predstavljeni su delovi institucionalne i obrazovne infrastrukture EU u oblasti kontrole naoružanja i pružen detaljniji pregled stanja ove discipline u pojedinim akademskim institucijama Zapadnog Balkana. Autorice zaključuju da većina zemalja Zapadnog Balkana sledi primere EU na strateškom i institucionalnom planu, ali da bi se u ovim zemljama trebalo više raditi na unapređenju diplomatske i obrazovne arhitekture u oblasti kontrole naoružanja, stvarajući na taj način realan potencijal da postanu promoter kontrole naoružanja na širem evropskom prostoru kao jedini evropski region koji još uvek uspešno primenjuje podregionalni režim kontrole naoružanja.

Ključne reči: Evropska unija; Konzorcijum EU za neproliferaciju i razoružanje; Zapadni Balkan; kontrola naoružanja; konvencionalno oružje; oružje za masovno uništenje

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