Photo: DCAF

# Strategy for Europe and Central Asia
## 2021 - 2024

## Introduction

DCAF has been providing policy advice and capacity building assistance to the countries of Southeast Europe, Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, and Central Asia - collectively known as the Europe and Centra Asia (ECA) area - for over two decades. In that time, DCAF has established itself as a trustworthy and reputable partner capable of accompanying complex security sector reform (SSR) processes that contribute to rebuilding and sustaining peace, establishing democratic institutions, and ensuring that national security sectors are held accountable.

DCAF's goal is to assist countries to achieve their own strategic objectives, which are largely identical across security and justice domains. These include building and strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law, adopting new regulatory frameworks to ensure a clear shift from a regime security towards a human security paradigm, ensuring that security provision is a service delivered equally to all, increasing the transparency of security policy and security sectors, strengthening accountability and oversight mechanisms to safeguard democratic governance processes, and increasing resilience against governance setbacks. Several countries have expressed a strong determination to adopt Euro-Atlantic norms and standards and to achieve a rapprochement with, and ultimately membership of, the European Union (EU) and NATO. DCAF has assisted their efforts to align policies and practices with EU and NATO membership criteria.

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In order to continue to provide effective support to beneficiaries and partners in the ECA area, DCAF will maintain its flexible response to the SSR needs and priorities of its members and partners by designing tailored assistance programmes and applying DCAF's exceptional expertise. The portfolio of activities and projects in Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, and Central Asia will be expanded both thematically and geographically.

### Southeast Europe (SEE)

The SEE region has undergone significant change following the fall of communism and the end of conflict in the former Yugoslavia in the early 2000s. Today, states in the region find themselves at various stages of post-conflict stabilization and are committed to effecting systemic change across all sectors to address the legacies of conflict and achieve Euro-Atlantic integration. The prospect of

EU integration has been a primary incentive for change and the promise of membership remains the key vector for securing the region's long-term stability.

The basic normative and institutional foundations of good security governance have been established across the region as a result of several waves of reform aimed at shifting the focus of security provision to ensure that citizens are the ultimate beneficiaries of security policies.

However, the process of democratic consolidation remains slow and unsettled; the rule of law needs to be strengthened throughout the region, corruption continues to thwart progress, and bilateral relations remain fragile. The region continues to depend on the international community's security presence and crisis management efforts to ensure its stability. At the same time, it is clear that regional stability can only be achieved if political leaders commit to defining and realizing a common vision of stability, economic, and social development as the only way to address legacies of discord and conflict.

### Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, and Central Asia

Security challenges in Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, and Central Asia largely originate from the cultural, economic, and geopolitical inheritance of the former Soviet Union and its collapse, which witnessed the establishment of new political regimes, the eruption of conflicts and revolutions, the emergence of terrorism, geopolitical rivalry and frequent shifts in foreign and security policies. Four countries in this area have not yet established diplomatic relations, most have unresolved territorial disputes, and autocratic legacies still heavily impact democratization efforts. Security sectors in post-soviet states are enormous in complexity and size, composed of diverse agencies with unclear and overlapping mandates that are regulated by laws and policies limited in transparency.

Countries such as Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia have initiated important security sector reforms. Continued international support is needed in providing policy advice and capacity building for security providers, oversight bodies and civil society, while reform agendas must consider foreign policy issues and concerns within an increasingly polarized geopolitical context. These difficulties are exacerbated by protracted and unresolved conflicts which often pose an obstacle to the progress of democratization processes by directing the focus of security policy away from tackling governance concerns.

The COVID crisis risks further amplifying the democratic deficits faced by some states in the ECA region as health-related emergency measures can be misused to suppress political dissent and restrict civic dialogue.

All states across the region will at some point have to manage a transition in their security sector governance system. Security sector institutions will have to bolster their democratic legitimacy, aligning their policies, strategies, and actions with the needs of the population. The judiciary will have to enhance its professionalism and its independence to guarantee the rule of law and protect human rights.

# Key Security Challenges and Opportunities

### Weak democratic governance, institutional fragility, frozen intra- and inter-state conflicts

Several countries in the ECA area have made important achievements in consolidating democratic institutions and opening space for dialogue with citizens. A weakened multilateral system and an intensified competition for the spheres of interest in the ECA area will continue to hamper the resolution of conflicts and potentially weaken incentives to build states and institutions upon the values of democratic governance, rule of law and human rights. Countries that have chosen to integrate democratic governance norms will likely continue to face challenges in adopting and applying them while managing daunting political, social and economic transitions and will continue to count on external advice and support. If defence and security sectors remain unaccountable to civilian authorities, lack transparency and waste valuable national resources, genuine political and economic modernization is unlikely.

### Corruption in the justice and security sectors stifles rule of law

Corruption in the justice and security sectors mirrors the level of corruption present in political and economic life in many countries in the region. Often, institutions acknowledge the challenge, but lack the strategy and capacities to build and maintain a high level of integrity.

### Legislatures remain sidelined

Despite gaining the authority to oversee the security sector as a result of the emergence of new democratic states, parliaments in the region remain sidelined when it comes to security sector oversight, often due to

> Normative frameworks, policies, and institutional practices have yet to affirm the democratic civilian control of the armed forces.

an underdeveloped parliamentary culture. Political parties and elected representatives have not accepted that parliament is an institution for political debate, and sometimes resort to procedural or other means to prevent political opponents from voicing critical views. Additionally, parliaments and other oversight bodies lack access to information, clear oversight procedures, and analytical and support capacities, which limits them from exerting effective control over the executive in security policy.

## Serious and organized crime and irregular migration require stronger law enforcement cooperation

Countries in the ECA area are faced by the pressing challenges of serious and organized crime and irregular migration.  Tackling them will require reform of national law enforcement systems as well as development of cross-border cooperation. Cooperation will only develop from strong political will and the recognition by decision makers in the region that organized crime is as much a threat to their country's democratic institutions as it is to global security. While progress in the Western Balkan region is clear, owing to EU conditionality and the development of regional approaches and mechanisms, such as the Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast Europe, these mechanisms are not sufficiently developed in much of the Eastern Partnership region.

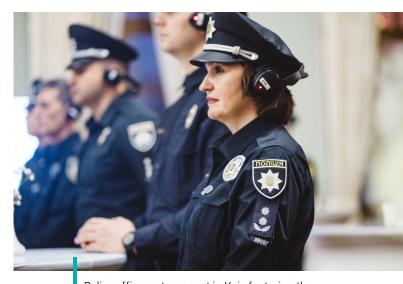## Defence sector evades democratic control

In the post-soviet space, undeveloped civil-military relations continue to present a challenge to fledgling democratic processes. Normative frameworks, policies, and institutional practices have yet to introduce or fully implement effective democratic civilian control of the armed forces.

## Limited spaces for civil society organizations to influence SSR

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have many essential roles in a democratic society. They can hold governments to account, foster public demand for reform, and be a constructive partner engaging in policy dialogue and advocating for reforms that address the concerns and needs of communities. While CSOs focusing on SSR have emerged throughout the ECA area, they are not recognized sufficiently as legitimate stakeholders in security governance issues. In some countries they have faced pressure and even open threats, especially if they attempt to gather evidence on governance deficits and voice open criticism.

## Inefficient management of security sector institutions

The EU integration process requires countries to both align their legislation with the EU acquis, and show a credible track record of its implementation. In this process, justice and law enforcement institutions receive particular emphasis for reform. In order to reach the European standards of practice, security sector institutions will need to improve their capacities to strategically manage institutional change.



Police officers at an event in Kyiv featuring the Canadian-funded DCAF project that is supporting institutional and strategic reform within the National Police of Ukraine. Photo: Canada/Volkov

## Gender inequality in security and justice provision

There have been concerted efforts in recent years to structurally promote gender equality in the security sector in the Western Balkan region, Georgia, and Ukraine. Notably, countries in the ECA area have recognized the need to better address sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic violence. Still, governments in the region have varying levels of willingness to address the serious problem of violence against people based on their sexual orientation and gender identity.

### Deficits in intelligence governance and accountability

One of the most daunting challenges facing countries in the ECA area is ensuring that intelligence sectors are democratically governed and efficient. There is a need for modernised legislation to regulate powers and jurisdictions of agencies in line with international norms and standards. Intelligence oversight mechanisms need to be strengthened and internal control and proper executive control established.

### Capacity deficits in cybersecurity and the limited involvement of parliaments and civil society in governance

Many countries in the ECA area have drafted national cybersecurity strategies which stress the importance of universal access to the internet, online transparency, privacy, and data protection. Some have adopted e-government strategies highlighting the strategic importance of digitalization and the development of online services. However, cybersecurity preparedness is still a challenge. This puts the critical infrastructure and citizens at risk. Computer emergency response teams responsible for protecting the national/ministerial networks need to increase their efficiency and collaboration with cybersecurity stakeholders. Policymakers must be equipped with knowledge and tools for developing and implementing cybersecurity policies and national institutions be enabled to address growing cyberspace threats.

## DCAF's Approach

DCAF recognizes that national actors hold the primary responsibility for undertaking SSR and focuses on accompanying SSR efforts and processes in a way that reinforces local ownership. When advising national authorities, DCAF tailors advice to suit their needs and seeks to provide them with a comparative perspective on international norms and standards as well as existing good practice.

DCAF bases its assistance on permanent dialogue and trusted partnerships with relevant national actors, emphasizes the neutral/impartial nature of its advice, applies a holistic approach to SSR, and supports all security sector actors.

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ECA countries have made progress in SSR and established some of the institutional and regulatory foundations for good SSG. However, more needs to be done to address the specific deficits outlined in the challenges above. This effort requires international programmes and approaches to be more coordinated and integrated, something that DCAF is uniquely well positioned to support.

# Objectives



## Reaffirm the value of democratic governance in addressing current and emerging security challenges.

### Parliamentary assistance

DCAF assists parliaments and independent oversight bodies to legislate, oversee the sector, and play a more effective role within the democratic governance framework. In recent years, DCAF has increased its work with independent state bodies in charge of controlling the security sector, such as ombuds institutions for the armed forces and other legally mandated independent oversight bodies. DCAF will continue to explore opportunities to build the capacity of these important institutions.

### Regional police and border management cooperation

Focusing on the Southeast Europe region, DCAF will continue to foster regional exchange and cooperation to build confidence, establish regional dialogue on security, and improve

the capacities of security actors. DCAF, through the work of its regional office in Ljubljana, Slovenia, will implement the regional border security programme and continue to support the Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast Europe (PCC), particularly the implementation of the PCC Prüm-like treaty on the automated exchange of information as an investment to transferring EU norms to a region in its neighbourhood.

## Police reform and increase of police integrity

DCAF will assist police and border police reform processes at the national level; it will support police agencies in designing and implementing strategic reforms. DCAF will support police in enhancing organisational integrity . DCAF will also promote and support institutional processes aimed at mainstreaming gender and promote gender equality into police work.

## Justice and security

DCAF will develop tailored knowledge products and capacity building to foster the development of independent judiciary. Improvement in the criminal justice area will be a particular focus of our work. DCAF will equip members of the judiciary to make more objective judgments related to controlling intrusive methods of information collection safeguarding human rights. DCAF will also work to foster improvements in judicial responses to gender-based violence.

## Intelligence governance

DCAF will support key intelligence governance and accountability actors in strengthening the regulatory frameworks and ensuring the coordination and oversight of the intelligence services. DCAF will contribute to enhancing parliamentary and independent intelligence oversight and strengthening capacities of the judiciary to exert control over the sector.

## Cybersecurity governance

DCAF will support the development of national legal and policy frameworks to promote good cybersecurity governance and provide practical guidance to assist stakeholders in ensuring effective governance of the cybersecurity sector and enhancing responses to cyber threats. DCAF will promote international and regional cooperation and multi-stakeholder engagements across the public and private sectors.

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## Defence reform

In post-soviet countries in Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia, DCAF will build capacities in defence sectors and provide policy advice to support countries in establishing and enhancing the civilian democratic control of armed forces and building integrity in the defence sector. DCAF will work with ministries of defence and armed forces and will leverage our internal policy research and gender expertise, as well as experience in supporting the work of the International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces, to focus on human rights and gender equality policies and mechanisms.

## Civil society support

DCAF will work to empower civil society actors in their role in improving security and justice sector services and governance through enabling informed exchanges between the security sector and citizens. DCAF assistance activities will concentrate on supporting capacity building, research, awareness-raising and networking initiatives by local CSOs.

## Gender and security (transversal theme)

DCAF will support key SSG stakeholders in promoting gender equality in security provision, management, and oversight, and implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. Gender and security will be mainstreamed across the ECA portfolio.

## Strategic management in security sector institutions (transversal theme)

DCAF will assist security sector institutions (ministries of defence and interior, police services, and armed forces) to develop organizational strategic management capacities and design and implement organizational development strategies to enhance strategic management and promote good governance.

## Private security regulation

DCAF will explore needs and entry points for furthering the exchange of good practices on private security regulation at regional and national levels between key stakeholders, with an emphasis on enhancing cooperation between the private sector, parliaments, and civil society to formal and informal oversight capacities.

DCAF will promote local participation in decision making on public security and safety.

# Enhance engagement in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

In areas of frozen conflict, relevant to the post-soviet countries of Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia as discussed above, the local population lives and moves along and across boundaries of division, often experiencing limitations in their access to security and justice. Security sector reform practitioners have struggled to conceptualize an approach to SSR that considers various safety challenges faced by communities in these conflict areas. Limited access to these areas makes it difficult to obtain accurate and timely information on security needs and developments.

Various forms of dialogue and engagement around issues of security provision and security governance at the local level and led by local actors, could help in building dialogue and trust in these contexts, where state institutions and policies are often distrusted. DCAF will explore the needs, study lessons learnt, and contribute to developing approaches to support such dialogue, and work closely with the international community engaged in supporting peace processes in the ECA area to ensure that the security needs of conflict-affected communities are addressed.

DCAF will seek to contribute to an improved understanding of local conflict dynamics and the consequences of conflict on the provision of security and justice to communities, and to the development of confidence-building measures between key SSG stakeholders and communities by:

## Mapping and analysing security needs

DCAF will analyse causes and chronologies of fragility in different conflict-affected areas of the ECA region; it will map local needs as well as ongoing conflict resolution and community safety efforts by local civil society actors, and collect, analyse and disseminate evidence and lessons learnt on how these approaches mitigate the problems faced by communities when accessing security and justice.

## Fostering cross-boundary and cross-border cooperation

Supporting and strengthening cross-border and cross-boundary confidence-building initiatives by engaging local organizations and local government structures in dialogue. DCAF will seek to establish cooperation with relevant organizations active at the local level in areas of conflict to facilitate dialogue and peer-to-peer exchanges, and to build their capacities to advocate and influence policy.

## Support improvements in international partners' engagement

DCAF will continue to work with a range of like-minded nations and multilateral organizations to reinforce and improve individual and collective SSG/R support and assist in the preparation of staff to work on SSG/R approaches in the region.

# Strengthen SSG/R contributions to international policy and practice.

## Agenda 2030

Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG16), as part of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, commits states to achieving peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions. This is important as it formally integrates SSG/R into the development sphere for the first time. Fulfilling this goal and its targets will require states to ensure their security sectors are democratically governed. This is at the core of DCAF's mandate and activities in the ECA area. DCAF will collect evidence on approaches to the implementation of SDG16 by national actors in the context of their SSG/R efforts and identify further entry points for enhancing cooperation by convening consultations with parliaments, civil society organizations, and ombuds institutions in the ECA area. This effort is part of a global project implemented by DCAF which has the potential to broaden support and engagement for SSG/R activities from less conventional actors and institutions.

## Sharing lessons learnt in SSG/R

Obtaining and sharing lessons from the field will also be a high priority for DCAF and a valuable contribution to international policy and practice. DCAF's wide network of partners and diverse portfolio of projects have the potential to inform international policy and practice in areas such as women, peace and security, the integration of security actors in conflict resolution processes, and the implementation of Agenda 2030.

# Implementation

## Geographic coverage

DCAF's strategic priority will be to continue expanding its portfolio of projects and activities in the Eastern Partnership Area (particularly focusing on Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova). DCAF will also seek to maintain its present significant footprint in the Western Balkan region. In developing its actions in the ECA area, DCAF values fostering peer exchange and learning within regions, developing intra-regional networks for sharing of expertise, and sharing expertise and lessons learnt with other regions undergoing similar changes (South-South cooperation).



Launch of a judicial benchbook on interception of communications for prosecutors and judges as part of DCAF's support for the reform of intelligence services in North Macedonia. Photo: DCAF

## Strengthen partnerships

DCAF will continue to invest in developing partnerships with other multilateral organizations and multi-stakeholder networks present and/or active in the ECA area, in order to improve the coordination of international assistance. These include the EU, UN, OSCE, NATO, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the PfP Consortium of Defence Academies and Security Sector Think Tanks, the Global Forum for Cyber Expertise, the Regional Cooperation Council, and other regional networks and organizations. Continuing and strengthening dialogue with the European Union will be an important priority; the EU prioritizes security and justice sector reforms as affirmed by the Western Balkans Strategy and the Eastern Partnership Initiative, which offers a platform for dialogue between the EU and DCAF.

Improving coordination of international assistance continues to be a key challenge. Achieving better coordination, avoiding duplication and overlaps, and fostering synergies between international assistance actors supporting national reforms requires that national authorities are ready to play a leading role in ensuring that assistance programs target real needs.

## Staffing and deployment

The value of DCAF's field presence, which has grown in recent years, has been further underscored by COVID-19. Field offices provide valuable local expertise and insights and played a key role in ensuring the continuity of operations throughout 2020. Field offices will remain essential and potentially expand in

the coming years, with the added advantage of minimizing DCAF's carbon footprint by reducing the need for travel.

At the same time, DCAF will continue to offer tailored support to partners in a range of countries where a permanent field presence is not required or viable. As DCAF's thematic and regional portfolios continue to evolve, emphasis will be placed on ensuring headquarters and field staff have the skills and competencies required to provide expert advice of the highest quality.

## Outreach and communication

Another priority for the next four years is to bolster DCAF's outreach in the ECA area by ensuring that we communicate our work and our results, not only to our key stakeholders but also to the public.

> E-learning and remote advising have become an increasingly important part of DCAF's offer; these forms of support will be expanded and enhanced.

## Evolution in the context of COVID-19

Throughout the global pandemic, DCAF adapted its operations to provide the best possible support to partners in security institutions facing a rapidly evolving situation. E-learning and remote advising have become an increasingly important part of DCAF's offer; these forms of support will be further expanded and enhanced. DCAF is already working with partners to obtain lessons learnt and identify emerging opportunities for SSR out of pandemic responses. This work will inform countries' responses to other large-scale emergencies and natural disasters in the coming years.

Finally, as COVID-19 has clearly demonstrated, it is essential to retain programmatic flexibility to respond to political, security, and other risks, and also to take advantage of new openings and entry points for reform.

## Risk assessment and mitigation

Security sector reform is a complex and sensitive undertaking which comes with certain risks. Political contexts evolve, affecting the level of political support for SSR, and specific reforms may be perceived as a threat to current business practices or misaligned with existing incentive structures. DCAF's focus on local ownership helps to mitigate these risks.

Security risks, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings, may have serious implications for programme stakeholders, specifically the institutions responsible for security. DCAF prioritizes conflict analyses and a do-no-harm approach, carefully assessing risks to protect stakeholders.

In a global economy affected by COVID-19, financial risks are an additional concern. DCAF continues to diversify its donor base and, in the coming years, will place emphasis on developing strategic partnerships with donors that provide the multi-year funding and flexibility required to work in complex environments. Operating models will also be regularly reviewed to maximize the value for money offered by DCAF programmes. A special consideration will be paid to ensuring that the environmental footprint of our programming is overseen and mitigated.

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DCAF Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance

DCAF is dedicated to making people more secure through accountable and effective security and justice.