



THE UNIVERSITY OF DEFENCE IN BELGRADE  
MILITARY ACADEMY

# PROCEEDINGS

Military Sciences

Social Sciences

Military Medicine

Defence Technologies



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SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE  
ON MILITARY SCIENCES

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**International Scientific Conference on Military Sciences**



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# CONTENT

## PLENARY LECTURES

IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES INTO SERBIAN HIGHER MILITARY EDUCATION, Dragan Trifković.....	2
THE PROCESS OF NURTURING TALENTS AS A NEW REQUIREMENT IN EDUCATION OF OFFICERS AT UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC STUDIES, Srđan Starčević.....	9

## MILITARY SCIENCES - Military Sciences in the Function of the Armed Forces Development

THE DIRECT CONNECTION BETWEEN FORECASTING AND DECISION-MAKING AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE QUALITY OF THE COMMANDER'S DECISION, Branko Mićanović, Zoran Karavidić, Ivan Stojanović.....	16
OPERATION "PIPE" OF THE RUSSIAN ARMED FORCES IN THE KURSK REGION, Čedomir L. Gerzić .....	28
TACTICAL EMPLOYMENT OF THE ANTI-TANK GUIDED MISSILE PLATOON IN DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS, Marko Radovanović, Miša Živković, Aleksandar Petrovski, Rexhep Mustafovski .....	40
DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS OF THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION OF MILITARY SCIENCES, Miša Živković, Aleksandar Aleksić, Saša Devetak .....	52
APPLICATION OF THE DIBR II - TOPSIS HYBRID MODEL IN THE SELECTION OF A FORM OF MANOEUVRE IN URBAN OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS, Miša Živković, Marko Radovanović, Darko Božanić.....	61
PENETRATION AS A FORM OF MANEUVER IN OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS, Ninoslav Đudić, Miloš Vitas, Dobrivoje Mutavdžić.....	72

## MILITARY SCIENCES - Aspects of the Application of Military Sciences in Planning Military Operations

CONTRIBUTION OF THE STRATEGIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF MILITARY SCIENCES, Dejan Vuletić.....	85
THE TACTIC OF USING UNMANNED COMBAT SYSTEMS IN AN ATTACK ON A GROUP OF BUILDINGS IN A POPULATED AREA, Miroslav R. Jovanović, Milorad M. Petronijević, Nikola S. Malić.....	93
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN MEDIA ANALYSIS AND MANAGEMENT IN MODERN MILITARY OPERATIONS, Nenad Stajković, Aleksandar Pavić, Milan Miljković .....	107
BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CROATIAN STRATEGIC CULTURE, Vladimir Ušljebrka, Aleksandar Antić .....	116
COORDINATION AS A KEY ELEMENT OF THE SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT OF THE RIVER FLOTILLA IN OPERATIONS SUPPORTING CIVIL AUTHORITIES DURING FLOODS, Šerif Bajrami, Ivan Petrović.....	126
REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE FOR PARTICIPANTS IN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS, Slobodan M. Radojević, Vukojica M. Živanović .....	135

## MILITARY SCIENCES - Military Science and Military Organisation

IMPLEMENTATION OF EXPERIENCES FROM NATO AGGRESSION ON FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA IN THE TASKS OF CAMOUFLAGING THE SERBIAN ARMY, Željko Popović, Aleksandar Milić, Srđan Kostić.....	144
USE OF HYBRID WARFARE METHODS IN DEFENSE AGAINST A SUPERIOR ADVERSARY: THE UKRAINIAN MODEL, Nikola Starčević, Stefan Rašović, Nikola Slavković.....	153
LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM SUPPORTED BY ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN MILITARY SCIENCE STUDY, Zoran Karavidić, Dragan Jevtić, Nenad Kovačević .....	161
THE ORGANIZATION OF ARTILLERY OBSERVATION BY USING MODERN SYSTEMS, Aleksandar Račić, Branislav Bojanić, Vuk Novaković.....	167
THE USE OF REMOTELY CONTROLLED UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLES IN THE ORGANIZATION OF ARTILLERY OBSERVATION, Aleksandar Račić, Branislav Bojanić, Vuk Novaković .....	177
COUNTERMOBILITY OF WINGS AND SIDES USING REMOTE MINING SYSTEMS, Srđan Kostić, Jovica Milićević, Stefan Pusulić.....	187
APPLICATION OF CIVILIAN UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLES IN MODERN ARMED CONFLICTS, Hurynovich Aliaksandr, Kachko Uladzimir.....	199
AIMING AND SHOOTING AT A MOVING TARGET, Michal Mozol'a .....	204

## MILITARY SCIENCES - Military Science and the Physiognomy of Contemporary Armed Conflicts

BLITZKRIEG TACTICS – EVOLUTION OR REVOLUTION, Dragan Stanković, Tamara Gajić, Saša Devetak.....	216
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SELECTION OF THE OPTIMAL FIRING POSITION OF SURFACE TO AIR MISSILE AIR DEFENSE UNITS USING THE FUZZY-AHP-COPRAS APPROACH, Ivan B. Petrović, Šerif Bajrami, Radomir Lukić .....	224
APPLICATION OF A SHIP SIMULATOR IN SOLVING TACTICAL TASKS FOR TRAINING OF CADETS OF THE RIVER UNIT MODULE AT THE MILITARY ACADEMY, Vladan D. Nikolić, Svetislav D. Šoškić, Milan M. Kresojević .....	234
THE MODEL OF EMPLOYING A REINFORCED TANK COMPANY IN AN OFFENSIVE URBAN OPERATION, Marko G. Mihajlov, Vinko P. Žnidaršič, Saša M. Devetak .....	243
READINESS 2030 AND REARM EUROPE: IMPLICATIONS FOR STRATEGIC AUTONOMY OF EU AND SERBIA, Milan S. Milutinović .....	254
STRATEGIC POWER IN TRANSITION: ROLE OF DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN MODERN MILITARY COERCION, Dejan Stojković .....	262
HOW TO UNDERSTAND STRATEGY, Milinko S. Vračar .....	268

## **SOCIAL SCIENCES - Social Sciences and Their Impact on the Development of Military Sciences**

APPLICATION OF MCDM METHODS FOR SOLVING MILITARY PROBLEMS: LITERATURE ANALYSIS FROM 2014 TO 2024, Duško Tešić, Darko Božanić, Adis Puška .....	276
SERBIA'S MILITARY NEUTRALITY: A FACTOR OF STABILITY OR INSTABILITY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS SUBCOMPLEX, Stefan Rašović, Nikola Slavković, Nikola Starčević .....	292
MILITARY ETHICS AS A MILITARY SCIENCE, Dragan Stanar .....	299
THE INFLUENCE OF NON-STATE CYBER ACTORS IN CONVENTIONAL ARMED CONFLICTS: A CASE STUDY OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE, Aleksandar Bogičević .....	304
NON-STATE-OWNED COMPANIES AND DEFENSE IMPERATIVES, Čedomir Nestorović .....	310
THE EVOLUTION OF APPROACHES TO PARTISAN WARFARE IN THE MILITARY THEORY OF THE YUGOSLAV PEOPLE'S ARMY, Miloš Čorbić .....	318
DEFENSE DIPLOMACY IN SERBIA: UPHOLDING MILITARY NEUTRALITY IN A SHIFTING SECURITY ENVIRONMENT, Marija Vukadinović .....	325

## **SOCIAL SCIENCES - The Influence of Social Sciences on the Development of Military Thought**

THE MILITARY PROFESSION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEFENSE SYSTEMS BASED ON THE CONCEPT OF TOTAL DEFENSE, Anđelija Đukić .....	333
FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN THE MILITARY: THE ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ROLE OF AI-GENERATED TEXTS, Božana Solujić, Željana Andrijević Andrić .....	342
SPECIFICS OF RUSSIAN AND SERBIAN PROFESSIONAL TERMINOLOGY: PANTSIR-S1 SYSTEM, Ivan Andrijašević, Sanja Kolarević .....	350
DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE COMPETENCES IN HUNGARIAN AT THE MILITARY ACADEMY'S FOREIGN LANGUAGES CENTRE, Jelena R. Tričkovska, Biljana M. Nenadić .....	357
MORPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH MILITARY TERMINOLOGY IN THE PROCESS OF WORD-FORMATION, Tamara Vukomanović, Ivana Glavić .....	365
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE EDUCATION PROCESS IN THE MILITARY ENVIRONMENT, Tamara Gajić .....	374
TRANSFORMATION OF EDUCATION SYSTEM IN AZERBAIJAN ARMED FORCES, Telman Safarov .....	380
BUDGETARY AND ACCOUNTING MANAGEMENT OF THE FINANCES OF THE DEFENSE SYSTEM OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA, Aleksandar Savić, Milan Mihajlović, Milena Knežević .....	389

## **SOCIAL SCIENCES - Social Sciences and Military Organisation**

THE POSSIBILITY OF ACHIEVING THE NATIONAL INTERESTS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA THROUGH RELATIONS WITH THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, Mile Anđelić, Branislav Nikolić, Milan Končar .....	398
CHALLENGES OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY AND MILITARY EDUCATION, Miloš R. Milenković .....	405
INTUITION IN DESCARTES' METHOD, Damir Projović .....	411
INFORMATION SYSTEMS IN LIBRARIES, Tot Olivera .....	423
GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN HIGHER MILITARY EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA – CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS, Dragan Trifković, Sanja Kolarević .....	431
FINANCING THE DEFENCE SYSTEM OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA, Sergej Zarić, Vladimir Sekulić, Jovana Jakšić .....	441
PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE FACTORS IN THE CONTEXT OF COGNITIVE WARFARE, Uroš Miljković .....	449

## **SOCIAL SCIENCES - Social Sciences in the Function of Defence System Development**

FINANCIAL RESOURCES SPENT ON THE COMBAT DRONES PROCUREMENT IN COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD, Sonja Marković.....	458
THE ROLE OF ASIAN LANGUAGES IN RADIO COMMUNICATION ENCRYPTION DURING ARMED CONFLICT IN EASTERN UKRAINE, Milica S. Andrić .....	466
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VALEOLOGICAL (BIOHACKING) CONCEPT IN THE DEFENCE SYSTEM OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA, Dragan Todorov .....	475
THE FUTURE OF UN PEACEKEEPING: A RETURN TO "TRADITIONAL PEACEKEEPING" OR ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGES OF MULTI-DOMAIN OPERATIONS, Marko Pavlović, Bojan Cvijanović .....	484
THE IMPACT OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP STYLE ON MOTIVATION WITHIN MILITARY ORGANIZATION, Gordana Bukumirić .....	495
THE INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON INTERPERSONAL ROLES IN LEADERSHIP, Branko Mićanović, Zoran Karavidić, Ivan Stojadinović, Dragan Jevtić .....	502
GOOGLE TRANSLATE, GEMINI, AND CHATGPT AS TRANSLATORS OF MILITARY TERMINOLOGY, Valentina Rapajić, Ana Kovačević .....	513
ACCOUNTING INFORMATION FROM USERS OF FOURTH-LEVEL FUNDS IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND THE SERBIAN ARMED FORCES, Aleksandar Rajković, Aleksandar Savić .....	549

## **MILITARY MEDICINE**

NOVEL CARDIOVASCULAR RISK FACTORS IN THE CONTEXT OF CURRENT GUIDELINES, Jadranka Stanković, Milena Pandrc, Nemanja Rančić .....	537
PREVALENCE OF TRADITIONAL CARDIOVASCULAR RISK FACTORS FOR CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE AND ELEVATED FIBRINOGEN AMONG ACTIVE MILITARY PERSONNEL IN REPUBLIC OF SERBIA: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY, Milena Pandrc, Jadranka Stanković, Nemanja Rančić, Nenad Ratković .....	542
COST ANALYSIS OF SCREENING PROGRAM FOR ISCHEMIC HEART DISEASE IN MILITARY PERSONNEL IN SERBIA, Nemanja Rančić, Jadranka Stanković, Milena Pandrc, Nenad Ratković .....	555
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PLASMA HIGH-SENSITIVITY C-REACTIVE PROTEIN AND TRADITIONAL CARDIOVASCULAR RISK FACTORS AMONG MILITARY PERSONNEL IN SERBIA, Nenad Ratković, Jadranka Stanković, Milena Pandrc, Nemanja Rančić .....	560
MEDICAL CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN COMBAT: EVALUATING AND TRAINING NURSES AND MIDWIVES FOR HEALTHCARE RESPONSE IN BATTLEFIELD CONDITIONS, Leila Karimi, Somayeh Makvandi .....	572

## **DEFENCE TECHNOLOGIES - Defence Technologies in Contemporary Armed Conflicts**

THE APPLICATION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FOR MILITARY PURPOSES – CHALLENGE OR THREAT, Tamara Gajić .....	577
CARBONIZED YOUNG WALNUTS AS A PROMISING SORBENT FOR THE REMOVAL OF ORGANOPHOSPHATE COMPOUNDS FROM CONTAMINATED WATER, Vladan Aniđijević, Vedran Milanković, Tamara Tasić, Tamara Lazarević-Pašti .....	582
THE ADSORPTION OF MALAOXON ON TAILORED CARBON ADSORBENT FOR WATER DECONTAMINATION, Vladan Aniđijević, Tamara Tasić, Vedran Milanković, Radovan Karkalić .....	591
ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF BALLISTIC PARAMETERS IN THE TESTING AND CONTROL PROCESS OF 7.62×54 R RIFLE AMMUNITION WITH VARIOUS PROPELLANTS, Aleksa Aniđić, Nebojša Hristov, Andrija Veljović .....	603
SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE AMBIENT DOSE EQUIVALENT OF GAMMA RADIATION IN THE RAŠKA REGION, Biljana Vučković, Ivana Penjišević, Ivan Potić .....	613
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SMALL ARMS WEAPON WITH 9x39 mm ARMOUR-PIERCING SUBSONIC AMMUNITION SYSTEM, Damir Jerković, Aleksandar Aleksić, Željko Jokić .....	622
ANALYSIS OF APPLICATION OF 9X39 MM SUBSONIC AMMUNITION SYSTEM ON EXISTING AUTOMATIC SMALL-ARMS MODULAR PLATFORM, Nebojša Hristov, Damir Jerković, Aleksa Aniđić .....	638
ANALYSIS OF MODERN THERMAL IMAGING DEVICES FOR MILITARY APPLICATION, Katarina Nestorović, Marina Simović Pavlović, Veselin Živanović .....	651

## **DEFENCE TECHNOLOGIES - Military Technologies in Support of Decision-Making and the Employment of Military Units**

OPTIMIZATION IN MILITARY UAV OPERATIONS: A MATHEMATICAL PERSPECTIVE, Jasmina Vujadinović, Ana Zekić, Ivana Sarić .....	663
--	-----

DAY OF SUPPLY OPTIMIZATION FOR MATERIAL CLASSES 5.0: EFFECT ON COMBAT ABILITY AND COMBAT BATTALION LOSSES, Zbysek Korecki, Tomas Hoika .....	672
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF YOLO ALGORITHMS FOR TARGET DETECTION AND CLASSIFICATION IN REMOTE SENSING IMAGES, Touati Adli, Dimitrije Bujaković, Milenko Andrić .....	682
TRENDS IN DEVELOPMENT OF DEFENSE LOGISTICS, Marjan Milenkov, Vladimir Milovanović, Nikola Simić .....	691
GEOTOPOGRAPHIC SUPPORT OF THE SERBIAN ARMED FORCES THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF SAR TECHNOLOGY FOR FLOOD MONITORING, Miloš Basarić, Dragoljub Sekulović .....	700
MILITARY CAMOUFLAGED TARGET DETECTION THROUGH MULTIMODAL IMAGES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY, Mohammed Zouaoui Laidouni, Boban Bondžulić, Boban Pavlović .....	708
APPLICATIONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN COGNITIVE WARFARE, Nima Farzamnia, Hamed Rafiani, Ali Farzamnia .....	718

## **DEFENCE TECHNOLOGIES - Aspects of the Application of Modern Weapons and Military Equipment**

IMPORTANCE OF OPTIMISATION OF OPTICAL SYSTEMS IN THE ARMY, Marina Simović Pavlovic, Katarina Nestorović, Darko Vasiljević .....	729
THE USE OF MODERN MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGIES FOR RAPID RESPONSE IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS, Negovan Ivanković, Predrag Stojisavljević, Stevan Stupar, Dušan Janković .....	737
VISUALIZATION OF GEOSPATIAL DATA IN THE TEACHING OF MILITARY TOPOGRAPHY USING GIS, Nenad Faljak, Marko Prodanović, Darko Lukić .....	749
CHANGE DETECTION OF BUILDINGS PRESENTED ON TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS BASED ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, Siniša Drobnjak, Marko Stojanović, Nenad Galjak .....	759
EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH OF CHANGES IN PHYSICAL PARAMETERS FOR THE PURPOSE OF EVALUATING PREDICTED MEAN VOTE AND PREDICTED PERCENTAGE OF DISSATISFIED CRITERIA OF THERMAL COMFORT IN TEST PREMISES, Snežana Mališić, Mladen Debogović, Milan Atanacković .....	766
MECHANICAL AND THERMAL PROPERTIES OF CARBON FIBER REINFORCED EPDM-BASED HEAT SHIELDING MATERIALS AS INSULATORS FOR SOLID ROCKET MOTORS, Jelena Gržetić, Jela Galović, Sladan Grga, Slavko Mijatov, Marica Bogosavljević, Saša Brzić, Tihomir Kovačević .....	774
APPLICATION OF EEA AND COPERNICUS PRODUCTS IN TERRAIN ANALYSIS THROUGH GIS, Darko Lukić, Andrija Milosavljević, Nenad Galjak .....	781

## **DEFENCE TECHNOLOGIES - Defence Technologies and the Defence Industry**

THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY TECHNOLOGIES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF MILITARY ARMAMENTS AND EQUIPMENT, Igor Denić, Vlada Sokolović, Nemanja Sremčev .....	789
THE IMPACT OF USING TRAINING DEVICES AND SIMULATORS IN PILOT TRAINING: A CASE STUDY BASED ON PBN PERFORMANCE, Vuk Mićunović, Aleksandar Knežević, Ivan Sibinović .....	796
GENERALIZATIONS OF THE ROMAN DOMINATION PROBLEM, Zoran Maksimović .....	808
OPTIMISATION OF PLD SYNTHESIS OF $\epsilon$ -Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub> THIN FILMS, Violeta N. Nikolić, Jose F. M. L. Mariano .....	812
THREATS OF POTENTIAL USE OF NANOMATERIALS AS HOME-MADE EXPLOSIVES, Boban Ceković, Radovan Karkalić, Zoran Bajić .....	818
COMPARATIVE REVIEW OF SQL SERVER DATABASE PROTECTION THROUGH ENCRYPTION, Branislav Belotić, Marjan Milošević, Sava Stanišić .....	825
DESIGN AND MODELLING OF PLASTIC EXPLOSIVES WITH REDUCED DETONATION VELOCITY, Danica M. Bajić, Mladen Timotijević, Slavica Terzić, Mirjana Krstović, Ivan Dimitrijević, Bojana Fidanovski .....	843
EFFECT OF CONTENT OF NANO-SIZED PARTICLES OF COPPER (II) OXIDE (CuO) AND MANGANESE (IV) OXIDE (MnO <sub>2</sub> ) ON PROCESIBILITY AND INNER BALISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF HTPB – BASED COMPOSITE ROCKET PROPELLANTS, Marica Bogosavljević, Slavko Mijatov, Jelena Gržetić, Tihomir Kovačević, Saša Brzić .....	852

## **DEFENCE TECHNOLOGIES - Defence Technologies as a Material and Technical Factor of Armed Combat**

THE ADSORPTION OF NITROBENZENE AS DERIVATIVES OF PRIMARY EXPLOSIVE COMPOUNDS ON COCONUT SHELL-DERIVED ACTIVATED CARBON, Marko Krpić, Aleksandar Đorđević, Jadranka Milikić .....	863
VISION-BASED GUIDANCE SYSTEM FOR LANE FOLLOWING AND OBSTACLE AVOIDANCE USING MONOCULAR CAMERA, Salem-Bilal Amokrane, Ahmed Taki-Eddine Benyahia, Momir Stanković .....	869
INFLUENCE OF MAGNESIUM POWDER MORPHOLOGY ON THE ENERGETIC PERFORMANCE OF ISOPROPYL NITRATE-BASED THERMOBARIC FORMULATIONS, Mirjana B. Krstović, Teodora D. Stančić, Miloš Pavić, Katarina D. Nestorović, Danica M. Bajić .....	883



MODERN TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF BIOPROTECTIVE MATERIALS WITH A FOCUS ON THEIR APPLICATION IN PROTECTION AGAINST THE BIOLOGICAL AGENTS, Vanja Gujaničić, Marija Marković, Predrag Stojisavljević.....	893
ENHANCING ARTILLERY COMBAT CAPABILITIES THROUGH MODERN TECHNOLOGIES, Katarina Janković, Nenad Komazec .....	901
CONVENTIONAL LATHE MACHINE AND ITS DYNAMIC RELIABILITY MEASURES, Vaibhav Bisht, Ravindra K. Bisht, Rale M. Nikolić.....	908
POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS OF DIFFERENT 3D PRINTING TECHNOLOGIES IN MILITARY LOGISTICS, József Gyarmati, György Gávay, Ernő Hegedűs.....	923
INFLUENCE OF SURFACTANTS IN SOLVOTHERMAL SYNTHESIS OF HEMATITE ( $\alpha$ - $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ ), Nada Čitaković, Marin Tadić, Ivana Janković.....	932

## SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE AMBIENT DOSE EQUIVALENT OF GAMMA RADIATION IN THE RAŠKA REGION

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### Abstract

Natural background radiation, registered under standard environmental conditions, originates from cosmic rays and naturally occurring radionuclides. Its intensity is influenced by geological characteristics and the measurement altitude. What defines the strength of gamma radiation is the value of the ambient dose equivalent of gamma radiation. The ambient dose equivalent was measured using a Radex RD1503+ digital Geiger counter. This study presents the spatial distribution of ambient dose equivalent values recorded across the Raška region. The Raška region, located in southwestern Serbia, covers an area of 666 km<sup>2</sup> and extends between 43°10' and 43°29' north latitude and 20°27' and 20°40' east longitude.

**Keywords:** ambient dose equivalent, Raska region, geology of the soil, spatial distribution

### Introduction

Radiation originating from radioactive sources in an undisturbed natural environment is referred to as *natural background radiation*. It originates from cosmic rays as well as from both natural and anthropogenic radionuclides present in the Earth's crust, atmosphere, and hydrosphere (UNSCEAR, 2000). Background ionizing radiation is unavoidable and continuously affects the entire population. On average, the annual dose of natural background radiation is 2 mSv/year. The decay of radionuclides in the soil generates ionizing radiation fields that extend beyond the soil-air interface. Once released into the atmosphere, these radionuclides may undergo further decay during transport or remain on the Earth's surface through wet or dry deposition. Initially, radionuclides accumulate on the soil surface but are rapidly deposited into the top few centimeters of the soil, particularly if deposited by precipitation. The half-lives of certain radionuclides are comparable to the age of the Earth, ranging from 10<sup>5</sup> to 10<sup>6</sup> years (Draganić, 1996; Abdel-Rahman et al., 2010). Throughout their prolonged decay period, radionuclides present on the Earth's surface continuously emit ionizing radiation, which can

have harmful effects on organisms and can cause a change in the genetic structure (Janković-Mandić et al., 2007; Župunski et al., 2009). These radionuclides are present in all natural environments, though in varying percentages. Since outdoor radiation dose levels depend largely on the composition of the soil and the concentration of radionuclides in it, the terrestrial component of gamma radiation plays a dominant role in contributing to total external radiation dose. It is believed that 75% of the total radiation dose received by the global population originates from natural sources. It is characteristic for a certain area and depends on the geology of the terrain and altitude. That is why it is very important to know the level of background radiation, which would enable the calculation of additional exposure of the population in accidental situations. In case the soil is rich in rocks of volcanic origin (granites, diabases, crystalline schists), the value of background radiation will be higher, but therefore the strength of the radiation will be lower if the soil is dominated by sedimentary rocks (Stojanovska et al., 2016; Abba et al., 2017) and quaternary geological soil structures (Sannusi et al., 2014). It is known that the annual natural radiation at sea level for granite is 1.43 mSv/y, while the annual dose for sedimentary rock is 0.76 mSv/y (UNSCEAR, 2008).

Cosmic radiation represents another significant component of natural background radiation, accounting for approximately 13% of the total natural radiation. Primary galactic cosmic radiation originates from solar energy and consists of charged particles of very high energy (UNSCEAR, 2000). It rarely reaches the Earth's surface, but creates secondary cosmic radiation and radionuclides (Draganić, 1996). The total cosmic radiation on Earth has a greater influence at the poles than at the equator, due to the stronger electromagnetic influence that transforms the radiation. Also, with an increase in altitude, the radiation increases due to the diluted air, so that at 4000-12000 m above sea level, the radiation is higher, about 25%. On the other hand, the variability of geographic latitudes does not have such a pronounced effect - the total radiation dose is about 10% lower at the geomagnetic equator than at high latitudes due to the variability of solar cycles in these areas (UNSCEAR, 2008).

What defines the strength of the radiation is the value of the ambient dose equivalent of gamma radiation, denoted as  $H^*$ . In this paper, the measurement of the ambient dose equivalent in an outdoor environment was carried out with a digital Geiger counter RADEX RD1503 + at 26 locations within both rural and urban areas of the Raška region. Afterward, an assessment was performed regarding the extent of radiation exposure to which the local population was exposed.

## Study Area

The Raška region is situated in the southwestern part of Serbia, centrally located within the Ibar Valley and bordered by Kopaonik and Golija. The region's shape is approximately square, extending between 43°10' and 43°29' north latitude and 20°27' and 20°40' east longitude, encompassing an area of 666 km<sup>2</sup>. Administratively, it shares borders with the municipalities of Vrnjačka Banja, Kraljevo, Novi Pazar, and Tutin. According to the 2022 Census, 21,498 inhabitants live in this area, with an average population density of 32.2 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> (SORS, 2023).

The geological structure of the Raška region is notably complex. The oldest rocks are Paleozoic shales, including prominent phyllites, sandstones, and quartz shales. Intense geological processes during the Tertiary period resulted in the formation of large masses of igneous, i.e. volcanic rocks, among which the following stand out: granites, diorites, granodiorites, diabases, and basalites, while

tuffs and typhites are observed as accompanying rocks (Filipović, 2003; Penjišević, 2010). Due to deposition during volcanic eruptions, sediments - pyroclasts - are present in the ground. The base of the Kopaonik massif is an intrusive mass of tonalitic granite, which is separated from the serpentine mass by a schist zone. The composition of the terrain includes Mesozoic limestones and sandstones, then andesite and dacite, as well as eruptive rocks with occurrences of lead, zinc and iron (Vasović, 1988). In smaller depressions within the area, sedimentary rocks also significantly contribute to the geological composition.

The research was conducted in both rural and urban areas of the Raška region. A total of 26 measurement locations were selected, comprising 23 sites in rural settings and 3 sites in urban areas (Figure 1).

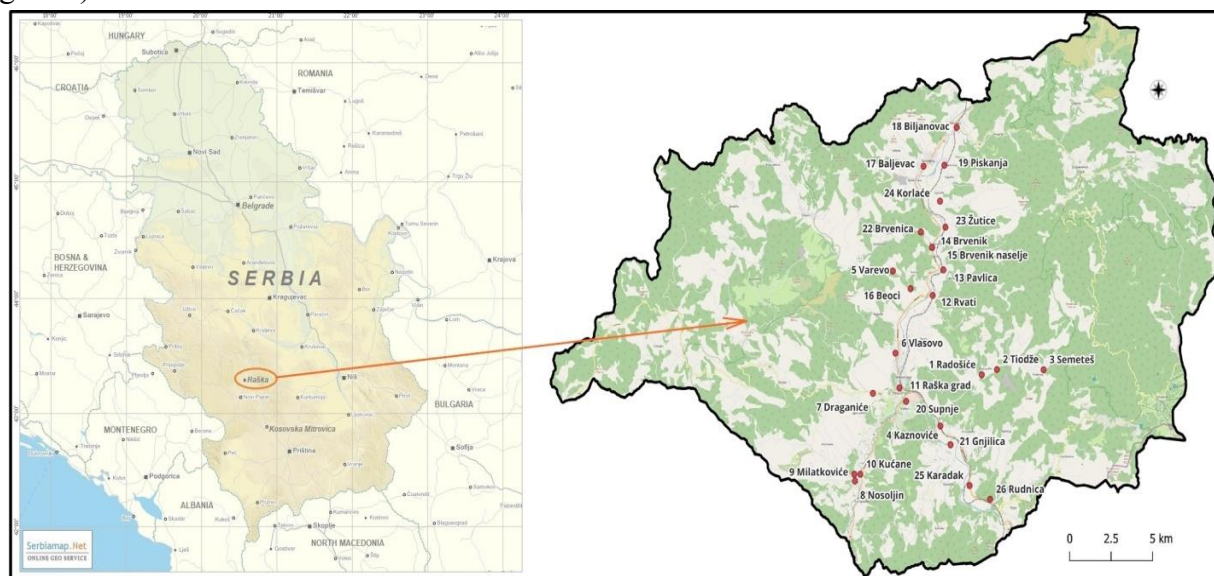


Figure 1. Map of investigated locations in the Raška region.

## Measurement Methods

Measurements were conducted in April 2025. On the day of the measurements, as well as during the two preceding days, no precipitation occurred, ensuring that radon exhalation from the soil was not elevated, which could have compromised the reliability of the data. In order to avoid diurnal variations in dose equivalent (Vučković et al., 2018), the measurements were performed between 12:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. The first step during the measurement was to place the detector directly on the ground to measure the radiation from terrestrial radionuclides. The ground beneath the detector was grassy at some locations and concrete-covered at others. The second step was to measure the value of the parameter at the same location at a height of one meter, in order to detect gamma radiation present in the air.

The measurement of the ambient dose equivalent of gamma radiation outdoor environment was conducted using a RADEX RD1503+ digital Geiger counter at 26 locations across rural and urban areas of the Raška region. The working principle of this detector is simple and rapid, based on four consecutive measurements within 40 seconds (PCE Instruments Ltd, UK). The Radex RD1503+ detector operates within the range of 0.00 to 9.99 mSv/h. The uncertainty of the gamma radiation measurement is  $\pm 15\%$  with a linear response between 100 KeV and 1.25 MeV, which covers most of the gamma rays emitted from terrestrial sources. Factory calibration was performed using with Cs-137

at 5 mSv/h. If a value above 0.2 mSv/h appears on the screen, elevated concentrations of radionuclides are likely present (UNSCEAR, 2000).

GPS coordinates, altitude and metrological parameters – temperature, air humidity and wind speed were recorded at each location at the time of measurement. The objective was to determine the correlation between the ambient dose equivalent and altitude, as well as the ambient dose equivalent and meteorological variables.

## Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the results of research at 26 selected locations. The current meteorological parameters are shown in addition to the values of the ambient dose equivalent of gamma radiation, as well as the altitude at which the measurement site is located. Of the selected 26 measuring points, 23 are in the rural area and only three are in urban areas – 11, 17 and 18. The data shows that the dose equivalent values in the urban part do not differ much compared to the values measured in rural areas.

*Table 1. Value of the ambient dose equivalent of gamma radiation and current meteorological parameters in the rural and urban part of the Raška region.*

No location	h (m)	H* (nSv/h)		T (°C)	Wind velocity (km/h)	Humidity (%)
		on the ground	1m above the ground			
1	617	100	140	17.1	9	58
2	976	160	130	17.2	8	57
3	1000	200	160	17.0	8	59
4	469	240	160	21.1	9	54
5	388	80	120	16.8	4	59
6	211	20	90	17.0	4	59
7	423	20	20	17.3	3	58
8	515	80	160	17.3	3	58
9	457	80	100	17.2	4	59
10	634	120	130	17.1	4	58
11	497	120	140	17.0	3	58
12	566	120	160	23.1	8	54
13	650	120	180	23.3	7	53
14	610	200	120	24.0	8	54
15	625	120	80	23.7	8	54
16	398	160	160	25.1	4	52
17	206	280	160	24.0	8	54
18	445	200	220	24.2	5	55
19	631	160	130	23.1	5	55
20	532	80	100	26.0	8	50
21	512	160	170	25.2	5	65
22	494	200	160	19.0	2	66
23	610	240	170	19.3	2	64
24	582	140	100	19.1	2	65

25	580	100	120	25.1	5	66
26	441	180	230	25.3	5	64
Max	1000	280	230	26.0	9	66
Min	206	20	20	17.0	2	50
AM*		141	139	20.8	5.4	58
SD*		65	44	3.5	2.3	4.6
GM*		122	129	20.5	4.8	57

\*AM – arithmetical mean, SD – standard deviation, GM – geometrical mean

Out of the 26 selected locations, measuring point 3 was located at the highest altitude of 1000 m, while measuring point 17 2 was located at the lowest point of the survey. The temperature ranged from 17.0 °C to 26.0 °C, with a mean value of 20.8 °C. The weather was calm and windless, as evidenced by the average wind speed of 5.4 km/h. The average relative humidity recorded during the measurements was 58%.

The ambient dose equivalent values ranged from 20 nSv/h to 280 nSv/h, with an average value of 139 nSv/h. Based on this mean value, it can be concluded that there is no evidence of increased radiation levels within the studied area. However, variations corresponding to the geological composition of the terrain were observed at certain locations. Specifically, measurements taken directly on the ground revealed slightly elevated dose equivalent values at three sites: 240 nSv/h (site 4), 280 nSv/h (site 17), and 240 nSv/h (site 23). Additionally, measurements conducted at a height of one meter above ground level indicated moderately increased values at two points: 220 nSv/h (site 18) and 230 nSv/h (site 26). The data further indicate that at ten measuring points, the ambient dose equivalent recorded directly at ground level was higher than the values measured at one meter above the ground. Specifically, at measuring points 2, 3, and 4, the soil composition is predominantly granite and diabase rocks. At points 14, 15, and 17, in addition to the rich geological composition, it is likely that radionuclides are present in elevated concentrations within the surface soil layers. Measurement point 19 is situated adjacent to a coal processing and separation plant. Furthermore, at measuring points 22, 23 and 24, the increased presence of radionuclides in the rocks causes a higher value of the dose equivalent, which is characteristic of the Raška mining area. At 15 measuring points, a lower ambient dose equivalent value was recorded at ground than measured at a height which suggests that radionuclides are present in lower concentrations within the soil, while the higher values measured at height indicate an increased presence of radionuclides in the air. Notably, only at measuring point 6 was the lowest dose equivalent value of 20 nSv/h recorded both at ground level and at height, indicating an area with a small amount of radionuclides. The highest recorded value of 280 nSv/h was measured at ground level at the lowest altitude of 206 meters. The measured values of the ambient dose equivalent are somewhat more pronounced in relation to the values presented in the Republic Report on the level of exposure of the population to ionizing radiation from the environment in 2023 (<https://www.srbatom.gov.rs/srbatom/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Izvestaj-Monitoring-2023-konacni.pdf>), which is a consequence of the geological structure of the soil of the examined region.

Frequency distributions of measured dose equivalent values and the spatial distribution of the measured values of the ambient dose equivalent in both cases are shown in fig 2 and fig 3.

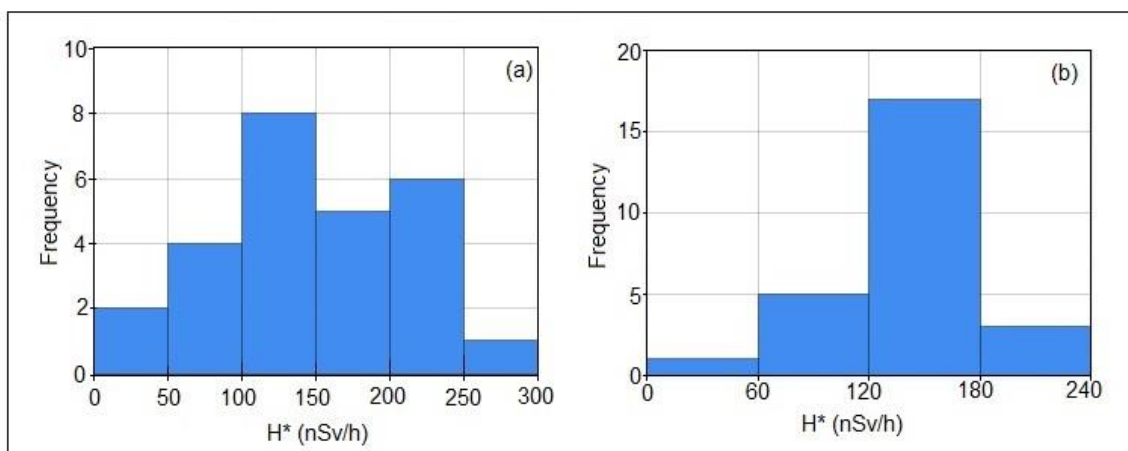


Figure 2. Frequency distribution of the value of the ambient dose equivalent of gamma radiation - on the ground (a) and at 1m above (b).

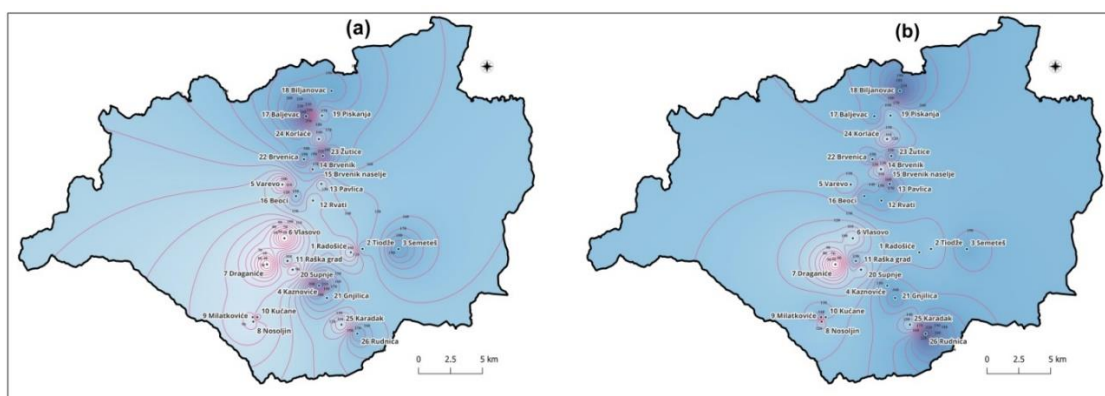


Figure 3. Spatial distribution of ambient dose equivalent gamma radiation at the measured sites - on the ground (a) and at 1m above (b).

The relationship of the ambient dose equivalent measured on the ground and at a height of 1m is expressed by the Pearson coefficient ( $r^2$ ) and is 0.4. The correlation between the value of the ambient dose equivalent and the altitude is not pronounced: 0.05 (on the ground) and 0.01 (1m above the ground). The correlation between the dose equivalent measured on the ground and at a height of one meter is also not pronounced: 0.1 in both cases, while the correlation between the measured values of the dose equivalent on the ground and at a height of one meter and air humidity is even less pronounced: 0.0003 and 0.008, respectively. Correlation between the wind speed at the measuring points and the value of the dose equivalent of gamma radiation measured on the ground and at a height of one meter: 0.05 and 0.08, respectively.

## Conclusion

This paper presents the results of ambient dose equivalent measurements conducted at 26 locations within the Raška region. The recorded ambient dose equivalent values ranged from 280nSv/h to 20 nSv/h, with a mean value of 139 nSv/h. The Raška region is characterized as a mining area with a rich geological composition, which is reflected in the observation that at ten measurement points, higher dose equivalent values were recorded at ground level compared to measurements taken at a height of one meter. Furthermore, at three locations on the ground (240 nSv/h, 280 nSv/h, and 240 nSv/h) and two locations at a height of one meter (220 nSv/h and 230 nSv/h), the dose equivalent values that were measured slightly exceeded the recommended UNSCEAR value. However, these deviations are



minor, and it can be concluded that the ambient dose equivalent values of gamma radiation in the surveyed area generally correspond to the UNSCEAR recommended value of 200 nSv/h. Analysis indicates a significant correlation only between ambient dose equivalent values measured at ground level and at one meter height, in other cases correlations were found to be weak.

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