

# The Small Nation Powering NATO: North Macedonia's Ammunition Industry

CINDERFORD, UNITED KINGDOM, December 9, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- With a population of just 1.8 million, North Macedonia stands as an unlikely but essential player in supporting NATO and Ukraine's defence efforts. Producing 800 rounds of ammunition every minute, this small country is making a significant impact as the world nears the third anniversary of the war in Ukraine.

[Video rushes and interviews available here](#)

[Stills imagery available here](#)

[Video interview translations \(North Macedonian to English available here\)](#)

Following an ancient Roman road out of Skopje, through the rugged mountains and villages of North Macedonia, lies ATS Ammunition—a factory that seamlessly blends history, craftsmanship, and cutting-edge technology. Amidst scenic landscapes dotted with beehives and mushroom farms, this facility is Europe's only ammunition factory capable of producing everything in-house: casings, primers, projectiles, and even the machines and technology that manufacture them. Though the powder is sourced from the U.S. and Europe, every other component is designed, engineered, and produced on-site by North Macedonians. The factory's workforce includes toolmakers, mechanical engineers, quality assurance specialists, and ballistics experts all united in a mission to meet NATO standards.

The site's origins date back to 1820 when it served as an iron foundry forging swords and knives. Over the years, it evolved, eventually becoming Suvenir Samokov, a Yugoslavian ammunition factory producing 9mm and 7.62mm rounds.

By 2018, the factory faced closure, with hundreds of jobs at risk. But in 2019, ATS Group—a



An ATS Ammunition employee checks ammunition rounds as part of the quality control process.

North Macedonian company with roots in textile manufacturing and ballistics —acquired the facility, envisioning a future in ammunition production. This vision aligned perfectly with North Macedonia's accession to NATO in March 2020, enabling the factory to supply NATO-standard ammunition in 9mm, 5.56mm, 7.62mm, and 12.7mm calibres.

Today, ATS Ammunition spans over 300,000 square feet, boasting state-of-the-art equipment alongside relics of its past. Since 2019, ATS Group has invested over €60 million to redesign and digitise its production lines, creating a one-stop shop for ammunition manufacturing. This includes bespoke, in-house machinery designed by ATS Technology's team of engineers.

Currently, the factory produces approximately 220 million rounds annually, with the potential to double its output to 1,600 rounds per minute as demand increases. By 2025, six new lines will bolster production capacity, while the workforce—already 300 strong—is set to grow to 450. Notably, 80% of the staff are women.

The factory's success is powered by individuals like Sara, a 26-year-old production coordinator whose family legacy at ATS spans generations (Her father, a mechanical engineer, has worked in the tooling facility for five years and her mother has worked in quality control and packaging for 9 years). With a master's degree in mechanical engineering, Sara joined ATS in 2020 and quickly advanced through its graduate training program.

"Working in ammunition manufacturing is challenging and exciting. It's a unique field where I can apply my skills, innovate, and contribute to something meaningful. I'm proud to stay in North Macedonia and build my career here," she says.

Jovanka, a 41-year-old quality control manager, hopes her son will also follow her into a role at the company. With a workforce of 80% females, Jovanka is seen as a strong matriarchal figure within the organisation, nurturing new trainees and employees. Originally from Makedonski Brod, Jovanka travels 50 mins each way on a bus run on by ATS Ammo that transports workers into the facility for their shift rotations. A typical shift is 8hrs with staff rotating around 3 shifts. She echoes Sara's pride. As a metallurgy expert with 12 years of experience at ATS, she oversees rigorous quality checks that ensure compliance with ISO, NATO and CIP standards. "Attention to detail is critical. We never sacrifice quality for speed, and I believe this is why women excel in quality assurance roles," she explains.

ATS Ammunition's commitment to its workforce extends beyond competitive wages. Employees receive health insurance, pension contributions, and travel allowances, with bus services running three times a day to transport workers from 54 villages. For those coming from farther afield, on-site accommodation is available.

The company also invests in the next generation through partnerships with Skopje-based schools and technical colleges, sponsoring and training 20 students annually.

Katerina, 30, from Tetovo, is a shift manager who joined the company 7 years ago. Her mother, father, sister and brother-in-law all work in the factory too. At 23 years old, she started work as a machine operator, inserting primer into the casings she's now worked her way up to become a shift leader.

'I'm able to learn and progress in my career. The leadership team is supportive, the culture is positive and my aspirations are supported by the leadership team and I feel my hard work is recognised and nurtured'.

Nurturing and developing in-house talent is a pivotal part of ATS Group's development plan. Through initiatives with Skopje based high-schools and technical colleges the company is sponsoring and training around 20 students per year to join the company across its textiles, technology and ammunition divisions.

Within ATS's sprawling facility, high-tech processes coexist with human expertise. In the proof house, ballistics experts like Alexander, 35 (who trained at ATS Group's project in Qatar) and his mentor, Branko, 61, (who has worked at the factory since 1981) rigorously test every batch of ammunition. "Knowing our products meet NATO standards and are relied upon by defence professionals is immensely satisfying," Alexander says.

While the factory's primary output is ammunition, its dedication to rigorous quality control sets it apart as a benchmark in precision and reliability. Every- half hours, meticulous checks are performed on each operation, all calibres, covering critical parameters such as density, humidity, temperature, range testing, and tooling accuracy. These evaluations are conducted concurrently to ensure that every round meets the highest standards of safety and performance. Beyond ammunition-specific quality checks, the factory upholds comprehensive environmental controls. Twice annually, assessments are conducted to monitor air, noise, and water pollution, ensuring the facility operates sustainably and responsibly. This unwavering commitment to quality underscores ATS Ammunition's reputation for excellence and reliability in every aspect of its operations.

ATS's ambition doesn't stop at North Macedonia. With - projects in different parts of the world and plans to expand into the U.K. and U.S., the company aims to solidify its role as a global leader in ammunition manufacturing while transforming the economic prospects of its employees and region.

From its historic roots to its modern-day contributions, ATS Ammunition exemplifies resilience, innovation, and community. As it continues to grow and adapt, this North Macedonian powerhouse proves that even a small nation can make a significant global impact.

About Us

ATS Group corporation based in North Macedonia, with 500+ employees. We bring together

technology, a wide range of high-quality composite ballistic products, and the production of small-caliber ammunition.

<https://ats.com.mk/>

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