



WESTERN BALKANS
PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS



**EUROPEAN UNION (EU)
PARLIAMENTARY FORUM ON SALW
SEESAC**

Monday 21, May 2007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**LAUNCH OF THE WESTERN BALKANS PARLIAMENTARY FORUM ON SMALL ARMS AND
LIGHT WEAPONS
22 May 2007, 14:00h, HYATT REGENCY HOTEL BELGRADE (CRYSTAL BALLROOM)**

The European Union (EU), South Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) and the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons have the pleasure of inviting you to the launch of the Western Balkans Parliamentary forum Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), to be held on Tuesday, 22 May 2007 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel from **14:00 – 15:00**.

The Seminar will be opened by Mr. Michael Derus, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Serbia, representing the EU Presidency; Mr. Lance Clark, UN Resident Coordinator and Resident Representative UNDP Serbia and Mr. Adrian Wilkinson, the Head of SEESAC.

On 01 November 2006, a preparatory meeting of the Western Balkans Members of Parliaments took place in Belgrade and it was agreed that a Western Balkans Parliamentary Forum should be formed in order to support parliamentarians in their small arms related work, contribute to the advancement of the small arms agenda, and provide a space for parliamentarians to meet and join forces with other stakeholders and actors, such as Members of the European Parliament and civil society organizations.

During the Western Balkans Parliamentary Forum meeting, Parliamentarians from the region will be briefed on SALW issues, including the impact on security and development of illicit trade and proliferation. They will cover the requirements of international agreements and the importance of a national SALW control strategy, and their commitment will be sought for the harmonization of legislation on SALW with the existing regulatory framework of the European Union. Parliamentarians play a major role in assisting government in formulating and then monitoring national SALW Control policies.

Despite much progress over recent years, the proliferation and illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALW) still remains a major issue in South Eastern Europe (SEE), fuelling crime, generating insecurity and undermining conflict prevention and peace building efforts. The states of the region are now at a crossroads and renewed efforts to implement regional and international SALW control commitments in a strategic and planned way will assist greatly in speeding their integration into European structures. However, a failure to invest significant political capital in addressing remaining SALW problems may jeopardize attempts to improve security and governance across the region in the future.



The increasing support of the EU for SALW control initiatives in the region during 2006 - 2007 is one of the most important developments. Following the agreement by the Council of the EU of a 'Strategy to combat illicit accumulation and trafficking of SALW and their ammunition' in December 2005, the EU has taken a number of useful steps to support enhanced SALW control. For example, both from Brussels and in-country

Delegation offices, EU/EC representatives have begun to reference SALW-related questions in their Justice and Home Affairs programmes and in political dialogues that occur within the framework of Stabilisation and Association Agreements.

In order to achieve greater future policy coherence and impact in SEE, it is critical that SALW control as a theme is effectively integrated into broader justice and security sector reform and development planning.

EU Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Ms. Benita Ferrero-Waldner;

"The countries of the Western Balkans have made impressive progress in eliminating and controlling SALW and it is vital that they keep up the political momentum. Compliance with European small arms policies will be a prerequisite for future accession to the European Union."

UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative, Mr. Lance Clarke;

"In the area of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) there is no shortage of evidence of the problem of proliferation and death caused by these weapons. Small Arms and Light Weapons have been shown to fuel conflicts, to hamper peace processes, and to undermine socio-economic development and prospects for post-conflict reconstruction. As an active player in conflict prevention, crisis management and development, the United Nations has seen repeated how progress in these areas are undermined by the unrestrained proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons. "

Simultaneous translation will be provided during the opening address. After the opening address there will be an opportunity for interviews.

For more information on the event and press accreditation, please contact the SEESAC Communications Officer and Western Balkans Parliamentary Forum Coordinator, Ms. Ana Martinovic at: 011- 344 6353 or ana.martinovic@undp.org