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### 13th Meeting of SALW Commissions in South East and East Europe

The 13th Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Commissions meeting was organized online on 13 and 14 April 2021 and it included over 50 representatives from 20 institutions in South East and East Europe. Commission meetings are organized to gather arms control policy-makers from the region to share common challenges and identify solutions to address the illicit possession, trafficking, and misuse of firearms. The meeting included representatives from Belgrade, Chisinau, Kiev, Minsk, Podgorica, Pristina, Sarajevo, Skopje, and Tirana. Opening remarks were given by Ms. Lene L. Hove Rietveld, Policy Adviser at the European Union External Action Service, and Mr. Amer Kapetanović, Head of Political Department at the Regional Cooperation Council.

“The role of South East and East Europe for the security and stability of Europe is crucial, and therefore the European Union has been increasingly supporting the efforts of the region, primarily through SEESAC. In particular, the role of SALW commissions is essential in ensuring the implementation of the Western Balkans SALW Control Roadmap and I want to thank you for continuing to take this process forward despite COVID-19 pandemic,” said Ms. Lene L. Hove Rietveld.

“The effects of armed violence go well beyond the loss of life and physical injuries as they pose a serious obstacle to the socio-economic development efforts. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is based on partnerships and there is no socio-economic betterment without a stable security environment,” said Mr. Kapetanovic, adding that “With our work, we try to gather all regional stakeholders and provide the place for discussing challenges and sharing experience. These meetings are another clear demonstration and message coming from South East Europe of the strong determination for cooperation, transparency, knowledge exchange, and joint actions while their common denominator is standardization with the EU.”

During the two-day meeting, participants were informed of the new EU Action Plan on Firearms Trafficking 2020-2025, which contains specific actions for South-East Europe and were given insights into ongoing awareness and public information activities related to firearms, good practices on import and deactivation marking, and threats coming from the diversion of firearms through their loss and theft. These are key areas of concern in particular related to the SALW Control Roadmap implementation.

The findings of the Project DIVERT, which focuses on the diversion of firearms from the legal domain into the illicit sphere within the EU were presented by Mr. Nils Duquet, Director of Flemish Peace Institute. Additionally, preliminary findings of the Gender Screening of Western Balkans legislation on firearms conducted by SEESAC were also presented. This screening aims to support the authorities in the region to fully integrate the gender perspective in legislation and policies relevant to small arms control and actively respond to specific risks that women and men face concerning firearm misuse.

Lastly, guest speakers from UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Katja Boettcher, Political Affairs Officer, and Mr. Tak Mashiko, Programme Officer provided up-to-date information related to preparations for the 7th Biennial Meeting of States and transparency reporting related to the UN's Programme of Action on small arms and its International Tracing Instrument, to increase the participants' awareness of commitments under this international document.

Meetings of SALW Commissions contribute to the creation of common knowledge on specific aspects of SALW control and sharing of practical solutions and trends. The meetings are currently funded under EU Council Decision 2019/2111.



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South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC)

Bulevar Zorana Džindića 64  
11000 Belgrade  
Serbia  
Telephone:  
(+381) 11 415 5300  
Fax: (+381) 415 5499  
E-mail: seesac@undp.org

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