

Previous Work
EUSAC 2014 - 2016
EUSAC 2010 - 2014
Arms Exports Control
➤ Regional Information Exchange Process (RIEP)
➤ Regional Reports on Arms Exports
➤ National Reports on Arms Exports
➤ Brokering Database
➤ Western Balkans Parliamentary Forum
CASM
2003-2008

Western Balkans Parliamentary Forum

Strengthening Safety and Security through Regional Cooperation in South East Europe

After the initial exploratory meeting held in November 2006 with the members of the European and EU member states' Parliaments, the Secretary General of the Parliamentary Forum for SALW, UNDP technical advisors and Western Balkans members of parliaments, **The Western Balkans Parliamentary Forum** was launched in May 2007. The forum is administered by SEESAC.

Globally, the Parliamentary Forum on SALW is a membership-based organization. As such the members – parliamentarians – own and direct the activities of the Forum. Following decisions by its members, the Forum currently undertakes various projects in co-operation with a number of international or parliamentary organizations.

The decision to establish the Forum stems from a conference in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1999, responding to the need for providing a platform for parliamentary action in this field. The Forum was officially constituted in the Spanish Parliament in 2002.

Today, the Forum is the only existing international network of parliamentarians related to the specific matters of arms control and violence prevention and its mission is 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 civil society organizations. Founded as an initiative by parliamentarians from Central America and Europe, the Forum today unites parliamentarians from various political fractions in Latin America, Africa and Europe.

Why Parliaments are important for SALW Control?

Parliaments are the only bodies with authority to create and reform legislation, as well as to ratify international agreements. As democratically elected representatives, parliamentarians have access to a public space and as such a possibility to create debate and stimulate public opinion. Parliaments also serve as links with civil society and governments, thus assuring both the legality and legitimacy of policy initiatives. The role of parliamentarians in small arms related work can be divided into, for example, three main functions:

- To propose, review, and reform national legislation
- To exercise control over their government
- To generate social awareness and support among the public in general for normative positions reflected in the legislation

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