

## **13<sup>th</sup> REGIONAL MEETING OF SALW COMMISSIONS** **13-14 April 2021, (Hybrid setup)**

### **Minutes**

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Thirteenth Regional Meeting of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Commissions was held on 13-14, April 2021. The meeting took place in a Hybrid setup. The meeting was attended by representatives of the SALW Commissions or the relevant responsible bodies for SALW control from Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine, as well as the representatives of the European Union. Special guests included representatives of the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs and the Flemish Peace Institute (List of Participants attached).

#### **DAY 1 - Tuesday, 13 April 2021**

##### **Opening Session**

The 13th Regional Meeting of SALW Commissions was opened by **Ms. Bojana Balon, Head of SEESAC**. Ms. Balon congratulated SALW Commissions for their work and strong commitment that has been demonstrated during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Following Ms. Balon, **Ms. Lene L. Hove Rietveld, Policy Adviser at the European External Action Service**, highlighted the importance of regional cooperation, emphasizing the role of South East Europe for security and stability of Europe. She further noted that the EU Council Decisions adopted at the end of 2018 and 2019, have provided accumulative financial assistance of approximately 16 million EUR, putting the Western Balkans on the top of the list of recipients of EU's financial assistance. Ms. Rietveld noted that the adoption of the Roadmap, is without any doubt the result of this strong regional cooperation established by SALW Commissions. She further mentioned the importance of the inclusion of authorities from Ukraine, Belarus, and the Republic of Moldova in regional processes and meetings. Ms. Rietveld underlined that this process remains a priority for the European Union and thanked the participants of the meeting for their presence despite the extremely difficult conditions and the situation in most of the region caused by the covid-19 pandemic.

**Mr. Amer Kapetanović, Head of Political Department at the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)**, thanked the participants of the meeting for their dedication to the process and underlined its importance for the overall security and prosperity of South East Europe. He expressed RCC's full support to the process as well as other regional activities implemented by SEESAC. Mr. Kapetanović presented the recently launched Common Regional Market in the Western Balkans. He also informed

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\* References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

the participants on the preliminary results of the regional public opinion survey ("First Security Balkan Barometer) focused on security, violent extremism and terrorism, organized crime, border security, illegal migration, hybrid threats, disinformation, and illegal possession of SALW, and announced its official launch on 24 May 2021.

## **Session I – Arms control legal and policy framework**

*This session provided information on the new EU Action Plan on Firearms Trafficking 2020-2025 and presented preliminary findings and recommendations of the Western Balkans analysis on mainstreaming gender into arms control legal and policy framework.*

*Chaired by Ms. Juliana Buzi, Regional Cooperation Specialist, SEESAC*

In the first part of the session, **Mr. Emmanuel Vallens, Policy Officer, DG Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission** presented the EU's Action Plan on Firearms Trafficking 2020-2025. He noted that the EU has integrated the Western Balkans Roadmap into the EU Action Plan and stressed the importance of the coordinated, coherent, and unified approach in addressing the challenges that are common for both the EU and the Western Balkans, and progressively Ukraine and Moldova. Mr. Vallens stressed that a significant challenge is the fact that there is no accurate estimate of the overall size of the illicit trade of firearms. He also mentioned that smuggling of the illicit weapons or their components into the EU is primarily from the United States (through the fast parcel and postal service) and the Western Balkans (through individual cars and coach buses). Furthermore, Mr. Vallens stressed the importance of evidence-based policy and better intelligence. He noted the need for better usage of the existing information systems in the EU and encouraged the participants from the Western Balkans to continue to use INTERPOL's iARMS system. Mr. Vallens congratulated SEESAC for its Armed Violence Monitoring Platform (AVMP) and announced the European Commission's intention to replicate this platform for the EU. He also presented the status of the establishment of the Firearms Focal Points (FFP) in the EU member states and announced the European Commission's intention to link the reporting of the key performance indicators of the Roadmap with the EU's Progress Reports for each candidate country and potential candidate.

### **Comments & questions:**

**Mr. Ermin Pešto, Assistant Minister/Head of SALW Coordination Board, Ministry of Security**, expressed his appreciation for the fact that the work done by SALW Commissions in the region has been recognized by the European Union, in particular pointing out the fact that the Roadmap has been incorporated in the Action Plan. He also inquired on the methodology used to estimate the number of illicit firearms indicated in the EU Action Plan, as well as the assessment on the percentage of illicit trade from the Western Balkans to the EU, compared to other regions in the EU's vicinity. Furthermore, Mr. Pešto inquired about the deadlines within the EU for harmonization of the national legislation with the EU directives and the reasons for the delay for certain jurisdictions. Finally, Mr. Pešto was interested in the reasons for the delay in the establishment of FFPs in certain EU member states. **Mr. Alain Lapon, Chief Technical Adviser, SEESAC** inquired whether there will be amendments to the European Tracing Manual. **Mr. Miodrag Lazić, Head of Department of European Affairs, Ministry of Interior** expressed interest in the timeframe for the reporting of the

EU member states on the implementation of the Action Plan. He also inquired whether the level of threat from the Western Balkans has decreased in recent years.

Mr. Vallens noted that the estimate of the number of firearms indicated in the EU AP has been derived from the Small Arms Survey study. He acknowledged the weakness of the methodology and confirmed that the lack of data is the main challenge. Nevertheless, the estimated number does give a general overview of the threat. He also noted that a significant number of military-grade weapons are originating in the Balkans, and while precise numbers are unknown it is safe to assume that most of the trafficked firearms to the European Union come from the Western Balkans given that trafficking primarily takes place at the regional level. He underlined, however, that most of the illicit trade takes place within the European Union while only a minority part comes from outside of the EU. Addressing the second question from Mr. Pešto, Mr. Vallens confirmed that the delay in transposition of the directive is of serious concern for the European Commission, and member states that have breached the deadline are facing infringement proceedings. He also presented the difficulties that the member states are facing in the establishment of FFPs, confirming that many are similar to those faced by the jurisdictions in the Western Balkans. Mr. Vallens provided additional clarifications on the update of the European Tracing Manual and stressed that the final decision in this regard is to be made by the EU member states. Finally, in reply to the inquiry from Belgrade's representative, Mr. Vallens noted that the reporting is not anticipated in the first year of the implementation of the Action Plan.

It was jointly agreed that due to lack of time, the presentation of the *gender analysis of firearms legislation in the Western Balkans* to be delivered at the start of Day 2 of the meeting.

## **Session II – Awareness on the dangers of illegal possession and misuse of firearms**

*This session provided insights into plans and current activities of the jurisdictions related to awareness and public information activities related to firearms as well as voluntarily surrender and/or legalization campaigns.*

*Chaired by Mr. Dragan Božanić, Gender and Research Officer, SEESAC*

In the first part of the session, **Ms. Juliana Buzi, Regional Cooperation Specialist, SEESAC**, presented the key findings for 2020 from the [Armed Violence Monitoring Platform](#) (AVMP) related to firearms incidents trends in Southeast Europe, including the Western Balkans jurisdictions and Moldova. The AVMP is funded by **the European Union** through Council Decisions 2016/2356 and 2019/2111 and aims to make **essential data on firearm incidents and their negative impact on civilians** in the region available to police makers, research organizations and all interested parties. Ms. Buzi also expressed the will for further expansion of the platform should the participants from Kyiv and Minsk express interest in this.

### **Comments & questions:**

Mr. Pešto expressed his gratitude to SEESAC for the ongoing maintenance of the AVMP and underlined its usefulness for undertaking active measures based on the data available on the platform. He also expressed interest in the repetition of the SALW Survey that was conducted for the period 2012-2016, underlining that the five years old data is already obsolete becoming so weak in

practical value. Mr. Pešto suggested that a new Survey is conducted covering the period from 2016 to 2020, with the same methodology applied. The representative of Pristina noted a significant difference between the number of seized weapons in Kosovo and the other jurisdictions and inquired about the potential reasons for this difference. Furthermore, he expressed an interest in bi-annual AVMP reports. Ms. Buzi confirmed to Mr. Pešto that a proposal for the new survey has been received by SEESAC and suggested that this proposal is further discussed at the next SALW Commissions Meeting where an agreement from all jurisdictions on the launch of the new survey would be needed. She also confirmed SEESAC's readiness to provide bi-annual AVMP reports in addition to currently produced quarterly reports. With regards to the discrepancy in the number of reported seizures, Ms. Buzi noted that the difference could be explained with the fact that the data on daily incidents for Kosovo are received directly from the daily police reports while for the rest of the jurisdictions either from official websites or media outlets. She encouraged other jurisdictions to follow the example in providing daily data on firearm-related incidents. Ms. Buzi also noted that the difference could be the result of more active operative work by law enforcement agencies in Kosovo.

In the second part of the session, **Mr. Alain Lapon, Chief Technical Advisor, SEESAC**, shared a presentation on good practices and lessons learned in awareness, voluntary surrender, and legalization of firearms. He provided practical guidance on how to design, develop and implement awareness-raising campaigns.

#### **Comments & questions:**

The representative of Pristina was interested in whether the legalization or the voluntary surrender campaigns are more prevalent in the region and which of these two have been more efficient. Mr. Pešto expressed his gratitude to Mr. Lapon for his thorough presentation and inquired on the most relevant elements and aspects that constitute an awareness-raising campaign. He also noted that the last joint campaign covering the entire territory of Bosnia Herzegovina took place in 2014. Mr. Lapon underlined the importance of an objective and targeted approach in the organization of awareness-raising campaigns. He also noted that the success of legalization and voluntary surrender is different from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and that both legalization and voluntary surrender campaigns proved to be successful in the past.

In the third part of this session, representatives of SALW Commissions highlighted the plans and current challenges related to awareness and public information activities:

**Delegation from Belgrade** noted that this area of SALW control has been the one most affected by the ongoing pandemic. The delegation noted that the new draft law for explosives for civilian use has been prepared. Furthermore, a new working group that will work on amendments to the law on weapons and ammunition was established. Both of these laws will go through the public debate which will contribute to raising awareness on these topics. Furthermore, several outreach campaigns to raise awareness are envisaged in the next two years, such as the awareness campaign on the dangers of unconscious use of weapons, particularly among young people, and the awareness campaign about the misuse of weapons for domestic violence, violence against women and other forms of gender-based violence. In addition, the delegation informed that a new process of collecting weapons has started.

**Delegation from Chişinău** noted that voluntary surrender campaigns in Moldova have had positive effects in the past. A campaign planned for 2020 was postponed due to the pandemic

and the current plan is to organize it in 2022. The aim is to involve the non-governmental sector, weapon owners (primarily hunters), build partnerships with institutions that are linked to SALW control, and work together to raise public awareness. Furthermore, a proposal was made to the government for the development of a legal document to regulate a voluntary surrender of legally possessed weapons. Currently, 992 collected weapons have been stored and planned for destruction in 2021.

**Delegation from Podgorica** expressed gratitude to SEESAC for the maintenance of the AVMP and noted that this platform enables authorities in Podgorica to have key facts related to firearms incidents and will be used for the fact-based awareness-raising campaign planned with the OSCE mission in Montenegro. They further reported that an amended law on firearms has been sent to the European Commission for review. This law envisages a four years long legalization period. Delegation from Podgorica also expressed its readiness to support other jurisdictions in the region and share its experiences on the organization of the awareness-raising campaigns.

**Delegation from Pristina** confirmed that awareness-raising activities planned in Kosovo have been largely affected by the pandemic. They also reported on the legalization campaign organized in 2018-2019, describing it as a successful activity.

**Delegation from Sarajevo** noted that a joint awareness-raising campaign was organized in 2014 and that subsequent campaigns were organized on an ad-hoc basis throughout the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina. New campaigns are being planned in cooperation with UNDP and OSCE. Representatives from Banja Luka noted that the pandemic has negatively affected the implementation of the planned campaigns. He also expressed **a request for technical and financial support from international partners for the implementation of an awareness-raising campaign focused on the abuse and improper handling and storage of firearms.**

**Delegation from Skopje** informed that an analysis of the legal framework in the area of firearms and explosives has been conducted. Law on explosives for civilian use and the law for development, manufacturing, and trade of military goods are in the parliamentary procedure. The current focus is on the establishment of the working group in charge of the drafting of the law on weapons. The delegation informed on the need to implement the awareness-raising campaigns that will increase the understanding of the public of the upcoming changes with regards to this set of laws as a new deadline for voluntary surrender of legally owned weapons and legalization of illegally owned weapons is envisaged.

**Delegation from Tirana** informed that awareness-raising campaigns in Albania are mainly implemented within the education system, primarily in high school schools. These activities were limited in 2020 due to pandemics. The delegation also reported that a new law on firearms was adopted and announced awareness-raising activities in the upcoming period of implementation of the amended law.

### **Session III – Programme of Action on small arms and its International**

*This session provided information on national reporting requirements and status under the UN Programme of Action as well as key discussion issues and priorities in preparation for the Seventh Bi-*



*annual Meeting of State (BMS7) on the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its aspects planned to be held on 26-31 July 2021.*

*Chaired by Ms. Juliana Buzi, Regional Cooperation Specialist, SEESAC*

In the first part of the session, **Ms. Katja Boettcher, Political Affairs Officer, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs** delivered a presentation on the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its aspects and the Seventh Bi-annual Meeting of State. In her presentation, Ms. Boettcher outlined the priorities, opportunities, and challenges that implementation of the UN Programme of Action is currently facing. She also outlined issues of interest highlighted in the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States (BMS7) preparatory process, including gender-responsive small arms control and women's participation, PSSM, marking and tracing, as well as border control and illicit manufacturing and regional cooperation.

#### **Comments & questions:**

**Ms. Jasmina Roskić, Head of Division on Bilateral Investments Treaties, Concessions and Foreign Trade and Controlled Goods, Ministry of Trade and Telecommunications** described the key challenges that Serbia has been facing in the area of export control of armaments and military equipment, underlining the issue with the accountability of the importing state and the diversion of weapons without the consent of the exporting state. Ms. Boettcher noted that diversion indeed represents an issue that requires to be further addressed.

In the second part of the session, **Mr. Tak Mashiko, Programme Officer, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs** presented the national reporting process under the UN Programme of Action. He introduced the online reporting template and presented how data and information are shared, processed, and utilized. Mr. Mashiko noted that 84 reports have been received so far, including from Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Ukraine.

#### **Comments & questions:**

The representative from Tirana further inquired whether reports from member states are verified and if any measures are taken towards the countries that fail to provide reports. Mr. Mashiko noted UNODA only verifies the data to confirm if any discrepancies exist and underlined that the member state's participation is completely voluntary. Ms. Buzi emphasized and encouraged the efforts in synergizing the reporting templates in order not to duplicate efforts and facilitate the reporting process under various mechanisms and international documents. Mr. Mashiko also noted that any additional information, such as national action plans, gender action plans, or other documents can be attached to the submitted national reports.

### **DAY 2 - Wednesday, 14 April 2021**

Day 2 started with the presentation by **Mr. Dragan Božanić, Gender and Research Officer, SEESAC** who presented the preliminary findings and recommendations of the gender analysis of firearms legislation in the Western Balkans aiming to enhance gender responsiveness of small arms control. He noted that significant progress in this area took place in recent years in the Western Balkans

contrary to five years ago when the small arms and light weapons strategies and related action plans did not take gender perspective into account. Mr. Božanić also presented a series of activities delivered by SEESAC in cooperation with SALW commissions, such as the Gender Coach Program and regional training on gender-responsive SALW control. He further noted that the current gender analysis of firearms legislation in the Western Balkans aims to take stock of the progress achieved and to assess to what extent the gender perspective has been integrated into small arms control policies and the legislative frameworks, as well as to see what are the remaining gaps and provide recommendations to relevant authorities. Mr. Božanić underlined that SEESAC stands ready to further provide support and to enhance the implementation of the gender equality commitment in the forthcoming period and presented several planned activities, including those to be funded by EC in support of the development of gender-sensitive licensing tools and risk assessment tools to improve the institutional capacity in Western Balkans jurisdictions.

#### **Comments & questions:**

Ms. Roskić inquired on the potential analysis of the criteria that EU member states follow with regards to arms exports and the prevention of gender-based violence. Mr. Božanić noted that the implementation in this regard remains a significant challenge and that there are only several cases when the arms export was banned due to the risks of gender-based violence. Ms. Buzi added that SEESAC will be able to provide considerable support in the integration of the gender perspective through a new regional project expected to be initiated in 2021.

#### **Session IV– Marking of firearms and essential components**

*This session presented good practices from the region related to post-manufacturing including import marking and deactivation marking.*

*Chaired by Ms. Juliana Buzi, Regional Cooperation Specialist, SEESAC*

In the first part of the session, **Mr. Zoran Vasović, the Director of the Agency for Testing, Stamping and Marking of Weapons and Ammunition in Serbia** delivered a presentation on post-manufacturing marking of weapons practices in Serbia, including both import and deactivation marking. He also reported on the use of the marking machine that was recently provided by SEESAC with funding by the European Union confirming that the new machine has significantly increased the quality of stamps.

#### **Comments & questions:**

In addressing Mr. Lapon's inquiry, Mr. Vasović confirmed that the Agency is also examining alarm and signal weapons as they are defined in relevant documents as convertible weapons which require approval of the competent authority in Serbia. Representative from Pristina was interested in whether the stamps from Serbia are internationally recognized. Director noted that Serbia's Agency is currently unilaterally implementing the Convention on Testing and Stamping of Weapons and that the stamps are not internationally recognized. However, he confirmed that Serbia has applied to join the Convention and expressed hope that it will be internationally recognized in 2022. He also noted that his Agency stands ready to provide additional information and share its experiences with interested parties in the region.

In the second part of the session, **Mr. Damir Karahodžić, Head of Department for Regulation of Weapons Production in the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations**, delivered a presentation on the practices and experiences with the development and drafting of the new law on marking of weapons in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In his presentation, he also elaborated on the key elements of the marking of weapons and ammunition and presented examples of markings in Bosnia-Herzegovina. **Mr. Karahodžić also expressed hope that SEESAC will be able to provide a laser marking machine to Bosnia-Herzegovina in the coming period.**

#### **Comments & questions:**

In addressing Mr. Lapon's inquiry on import marking, Mr. Karahodžić provided additional clarifications and underlined that firearms imported prior to the start of the implementation of the relevant law will not be subject to marking.

In the third part of the session, SALW Commissions representatives provided short briefs highlighting current practices of marking of firearms in their jurisdictions, including on the use of recently procured marking machines in some of the jurisdictions:

**Delegation from Chişinău** noted that the marking equipment was received in November of 2020. Furthermore, the delegation informed that experts that will conduct relevant activities have been appointed and that they possess authorization to mark firearms and to manage relevant records.

**Delegation from Podgorica** noted that the laser marking machine has been received but is currently not used as its usage requires the adoption of the new law on the manufacturing of armaments. This law is planned to be adopted in Q4 of this year. **The delegation also expressed interest to exchange experiences with the delegation from BiH.**

**Delegation from Pristina** noted that the marking machine is currently not used as it requires further regulations of the process and expressed hope that the new equipment will be soon put in use.

**Delegation from Tirana** informed that the marking machine is installed in the relevant center and that five specialists have been trained to use the machine. However, the machine is still not put in use.

**Delegation from Skopje** noted that, under the current legal framework, the marking of firearms and ammunition in North Macedonia is performed by legal entities authorized by the Ministry of Economy. However, they noted that this process is currently on hold and awaits a change of relevant law in the upcoming period.

#### **Session V – Tackling diversion of firearms.**

*This session focused on addressing the diversion of small arms from national stockpiles and/or civilian holdings, as well as threats from the diversion of these firearms from legal into illegal sphere and prevention methods.*



*Chaired by Ms. Jelena Bujaković, SALW Project Specialist, SEESAC*

In the first part of the session, **Mr. Alain Lapon Chief Technical Advisor, SEESAC** delivered a presentation on the Loss and theft of firearms, risks of diversion, and prevention methods. He presented the current situation in the WB, with the focus on the theft from registered firearms dealers and theft from military and police storages. Mr. Lapon further presented a case study on the thefts from legal dealers in Skopje during 2017 when 28 firearms were stolen and in 2018 when 56 pistols and revolvers were stolen.

In the second part of the session, representatives from Pristina presented statistics on weapons stolen in Kosovo since 2018. They noted that these thefts took place in various places, from shooting ranges, to residential homes and private vehicles. A total of 223 weapons were stolen (both in thefts where multiple firearms were stolen and incidents when stealing involved a single unit)

In the third part of the session, **Mr. Nils Duquet, Director, Flemish Peace Institute** delivered a presentation on the key findings from Project DIVERT, research co-funded by the European Commission, which focuses on the diversion of firearms from the legal domain into the illicit sphere within the EU. Mr. Duquet noted that theft is one of those diversion methods which has also led to trafficking of firearms, but also the direct criminal use and even terrorist use of stolen firearms within the EU. As such, it represents a very important internal security problem within the European Union. He stressed that the main problem in the EU is limited knowledge about the characteristics of different types of thefts. This is closely followed by the challenge to compare the EU member states due to their different types of records and reports and the fact that the data is not recent in most of the cases. Mr. Duquet elaborated on the primary targets for theft of firearms, including law enforcement stockpiles, armed forces stockpiles, and firearms dealers, and presented policy recommendations to prevent firearms theft such as safe storage rules as well as reduction of surplus weapons and securing of decommissioned weapons. He also expressed his admiration for SEESAC's Armed Violence Monitor Platform and hope that a similar platform will be established for the EU as well in the coming years.

At the conclusion of the meeting, **Ms. Juliana Buzi** thanked the participants for their strong cooperation in the preparation of the meeting as well as active contributions during the meeting. She recalled the clear evidence that came out during both days of the meeting of the joint challenges that South East Europe and the European Union are facing in several areas of arms. Furthermore, she confirmed that SEESAC took note of the various needs and follow ups that came out during the meeting in particular regarding the specific request from Sarajevo delegation related to the implementation of a new SALW survey. She suggested that this proposal is further discussed at the next regional meeting of SALW Commissions. Ms. Buzi also noted the request from the Belgrade delegation for further discussions on the new EU Council Decision on end-user certificates for the export of SALW and their ammunition. She confirmed that the SEESAC team will also follow up with each jurisdiction in terms of ensuring that further discussions are held on the key findings and the recommendations of the gender analysis of firearms legislation in the Western Balkans.