

FIFTH REGIONAL MEETING OF SALW COMMISSIONS 3-4 November 2015

Skopje

DRAFT - MEETING MINUTES

BACKGROUND

The Fifth Regional Meeting of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Commissions was held on 3-4 November in Skopje. The meeting took place within the framework of the EU Support of SEESAC Disarmament and Arms Control Activities in South East Europe (EUSAC) project component dedicated to improving regional cooperation on awareness-raising, information sharing, and knowledge transfer.

The meeting was attended by representatives of the SALW Commissions or the relevant responsible bodies for SALW control from: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (List of Participants attached). The main objectives of the Fifth Regional Meeting were for participants to share information on the implementation of SALW control strategies as well as efforts to combat the illicit possession of SALW, and to discuss armed violence prevention and reduction policies– including their integration into Sustainable Development Plans and Strategies.

The following **action points** were agreed upon:

- Discuss the prospect of a Regional SALW Strategy at the next meeting;
- SEESAC will continue to offer its support to Albania and Moldova in establishing their SALW Commissions;
- There is still a need for collecting and consolidating SALW data in the region;
- Montenegro to share its Rulebook on Amnesty at the next meeting

DAY ONE

OPENING REMARKS

Dr. Ivan Zveržhanovski, SEESAC Coordinator, opened the meeting by welcoming participants and stressing the importance of these meetings in sharing information and knowledge on issues related to SALW control in the region

Dr. Duško Ivanov, State Counsellor for Legal Affairs, and Focal Point for SALW noted that this meeting is an opportunity for South East Europe representatives to make another practical contribution to efforts for more efficient and coordinated small arms control.

Mr. Martin Klaucke, Head of Operations, EU Delegation in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia similarly expressed his pleasure of seeing experts from the region coming together at these meetings and pointed out the importance of cooperation and the sharing of information in the area of arms control in the Western Balkans. He recalled the EU and international binding agreements in this area and the fact that the

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

meeting takes place under the regional cooperation component of EUSAC – funded by the European Union under the 9 December 2013 [EU Council Decision 2013/730/CFSP](#).

Ms. Stefana Greavu, Head of Political Department, Regional Cooperation Council, gave an overview of the activities of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) in promoting mutual cooperation and European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of SEE. Further, she emphasized that the effective control of small arms and light weapons is not only a security issue but one that influences the development planning and processes of the region. She commended SEESAC's work as an essential contribution to efforts to promote safety and security through regional cooperation.

SESSION I: IMPLEMENTATION OF SALW CONTROL STRATEGIES – PROGRESS UPDATE BY SALW COMMISSION REPRESENTATIVES

Col. Ardian Lilo, Head of Strategic Policies Directorate, Ministry of Defence, noted that Albania does not have a SALW Commission yet but that several government institutions are working together to implement SALW control activities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is currently leading the working group for the establishment of the SALW Commission while the Ministry of Interior will take the lead once this is established. The SALW Control activities focus on demilitarization and replacing of existing light infantry weapons – according to the Law 74/2014 [On Weapons](#). The main challenges identified are: ensuring a comprehensive response; complete the legislation on weapons with the relevant bylaws and Standard Operating Procedures; clearly define responsibilities among the different agencies; keep national records of all SALW-related operations; enhance border control, SALW stockpile security, SALW registration and tracing, and regional cooperation to stop illegal trafficking.

Mr. Ermin Pešto, Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Security, noted that SALW control activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina are in line with the SALW Strategy. Mr. Pešto outlined the strategic goals set for SALW control, namely: advancement of the legal framework; reducing the presence of illegal SALW; management of SALW control by the relevant institutions and agencies; and international and regional cooperation – including cooperation with international organizations. Mr. Pešto pointed out as challenges, the complex political structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the lack of personnel to implement the relevant activities. **Mr. Denis Selimović, State Coordination Board, Ministry of Defence**, offered additional details on the reduction of surpluses, stockpile security improvements, and the SECUP and EXPLODE projects.

Mr. Mensur Hoti, Director of Department of Public Safety, Head of SALW Commission, gave an overview of SALW control activities in Kosovo*. He explained that the new *Law on Weapons* which came into force in July 2015 was drafted in order to further harmonize with the EU acquis. The new law includes provisions on activities not covered in earlier versions of the law, such as export and issuing of licenses for natural persons. In addition, Mr. Hoti noted the ongoing management of SALW data, through several trainings and activities. Knowledge products include a handbook on the illicit weapons trade, guidelines for border officials, research on crime in seven municipalities, research on hotspots of firearm-related crime, and research on armed violence prevention (AVP). Furthermore, the SACONS database on firearms is being adapted to the law amendments, excerpts of which will be shared at the next meeting. The political situation was noted as a challenge in implementing the above mentioned activities.

Dr. Duško Ivanov, State Counsellor for Legal Affairs, and Focal Point for SALW, informed that SALW Control activities in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia include strengthening border controls, further strengthening the legislation, improving security and infrastructure of stockpile storages, and collecting and destroying firearms. Dr. Ivanov highlighted the importance of compliance with the Arms Trade Treaty, the International Tracing Instrument, and the Firearms Protocol. In addition, he noted that the

national legislation needs to be further harmonized with EU legislation, and that there need to be practical steps on the ground.

Mr. Victor Pereteatcu, First Secretary, Expert/Directorate of Security Policies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, informed that there is no progress in Moldova regarding the establishment of the SALW Commission due to the recurring political crises. However, he noted that certain steps have been taken for cooperation with colleagues from Serbia, Montenegro, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. He informed that the Law on Arms was adopted in June 2015 and expressed his hope that the strategy on SALW can be implemented following the establishment of the new government.

Mr. Mladen Marković, President, SALW Commission, Ministry of Interior noted that the *Law on Arms* in Montenegro entered into force on 19 March 2015 and that the legalization of weapons and ammunition as part of the amnesty continues. So far, 405 pieces of SALW and over 7,000 bullets, ammunition, bombs, mines, and launchers have been returned. Other relevant legislative documents include the *Law on Transport of Hazardous Material* which was adopted at the end of 2014. In addition, the *Law on Explosive Material* was amended, and laws on licensing, the use of fireworks, and conditions to be complied with by transporting vehicles were adopted. Mr. Marković noted that they have drafted a Rulebook on Amnesty, which he would share with participants. Montenegro also partook in the 9 July International Gun Destruction Day activities by destroying 800 pieces of SALW that had been returned by citizens.

Mr. Miljko Simović, President of SALW Council, pointed out that Serbia is currently the Chair of the OSCE. Serbia is in process of preparing a new SALW strategy and will ensure that civil society organizations are part of this process. He also informed that the mandate of the Council on SALW is expiring soon. Mr. Simović reported that the legalization and collection campaign in Serbia has been successful recognizing SEESAC's support. Serbia is hoping to receive accreditation for CIP, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs is working on preparing and adopting several rulebooks, one of which being the Rulebook on Deactivation Standards. Turning to surpluses, he noted that the responsible agencies will work on planning destructions of SALW. Similarly, the Ministry of Internal Affairs is working to ensure improvement of the security of stockpile storages through SEESAC support.

Mr. Simović concluded his intervention by supporting the proposal for a **Regional SALW Strategy**, emphasizing that countries have strategies that include goals which are common to the whole region and which could be consolidated into a workshop for defining a regional plan. **Mr. Pešto, Dr. Ivanov, and Mr. Hoti** offered their full support for such a strategy, as the region faces similar problems in the area of SALW Control which often require similar solutions. **Ms. Greavu** congratulated the idea, informing that the RCC is working on a new programme strategy to be presented to their board in May next year. If a Regional SALW Strategy is developed by then, it could be included in the agenda of that meeting in order to get approval from the highest levels. Full consensus was not reached on the proposal, and it was agreed be discussed in the next meeting.

Presentations are shared on the [Knowledge Exchange Platform](#).

Action Points:

- Discuss the prospect of a Regional SALW Strategy at the next meeting.
- SEESAC to continue to offer its support to Albania and Moldova in establishing their SALW Commissions.
- Montenegro to share its Rulebook on Amnesty at the next meeting.

SESSION II: ARMED VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND REDUCTION, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. David Atwood, Independent International Expert, offered participants an overview of integration of small arms control and armed violence policies into the Sustainable Development Agenda with a special focus on the recently adopted UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – especially Goal 16. His intervention was followed by requests for advice on linking the implementation of SDGs to the requirements under UNSCR1325 and the SDGs baselines. Dr. Zveržhanovski noted the importance of the presentation in providing useful information on how the SDGs can be used as advocacy tool in raising awareness on SALW control issues.

Following Mr. Atwood's intervention, participants shared their experiences and challenges in linking SALW control activities with their overall development plans and strategies, as well as their armed violence prevention measures.

Ms. Greta Nako, First Secretary, Expert/Directorate of Security Policies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, presented activities on armed violence prevention implemented in Albania. Ms. Nako pointed out that National SALW Action plans should align with the recommendations of the recently established Operations Office, and that an initial round of review has been completed, with results reflected in the National Strategy for Combatting Organized Crime as well as the Military Action Plan.

Mr. Denis Selimović described how the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina support the prevention of armed violence by reducing such violence and mitigating risks. He noted the role of the Ministry of Defence in reducing the surplus of SALW which prevents those arms from reaching the wrong hands. 77% of violence in BiH is caused by criminal gangs, so it is vital to spend resources on safeguarding stockpiles to hinder criminal groups gaining access to such sites. He also informed that 74% of civilians in BiH have guns which needs to be targeted further.

Mr. Mensur Hoti notified participants that there will be a new research conducted in Kosovo* for the new SALW Strategy as there are a number of illicit firearms in civilian hands, but not more than those used in criminal acts or trafficked through illicit channels. Instances of armed violence occur, but usually as instruments in criminal acts. Mr. Hoti pressed the importance of looking at the reasons why firearms incidents occur in the first place. In this regard, the Ministry of Internal Affairs is working on gaining a better understanding of the opinions and recommendations of its citizens. He concluded that this becomes particularly important since firearms were never raised in community safety councils as a main issue, to be addressed.

Dr. Duško Ivanov's overview on activities implemented in Macedonia to combat armed violence noted that part of the Commission's work on lessening the proliferation of SALW includes diminishing armed violence and building sustainable development. As such, prevention measures involve establishing more pleasant relations between the police and the public – working with the Rulebook on Police Work. Highlighting several projects within the Ministry of Interior, aimed at raising awareness of the danger posed by SALW and pyrotechnics, Dr. Ivanov mentioned campaigns on firecrackers, celebratory shootings, and pyrotechnics in general.

Mr. Gheorghe Alcaz, Head of the Weapon Circulation Unit, General Police Directorate outlined achievements in Moldova in armed violence prevention such as gaining access to Interpol's database iARMS; distributing 2,000 brochures on security measures when handling firearms; and 517 trainings organized with individuals and businesses in order to train civilians to comply with the weapons and ammunition regime. As part of the preventive measures, the Moldovan Police has carried out 1,642 raids to detect and establish violations in storages; ads on the voluntary surrender of weapons and their registration have been placed in public institutions; and the negative impact of the illegal possession of weapons was publicized in mass

media. Mr. Alcaz identified the remaining priorities as reducing the number of incidents with civilian-owned weapons, and increasing the awareness on the use of weapons. **Mr. Victor Pereteatcu** noted that since the population of Moldova is quite small, there are not that many instances of armed violence compared to the Balkans.

Mr. Mladen Marković in his presentation offered numerous examples of firearms incidents in Montenegro as a way to illustrate the broad spectrum with which the authorities are dealing when it comes to armed violence. He noted that the SALW Strategy of Montenegro and the Montenegrin police can only raise so much awareness, but there is still a gap between the strategy and the impact.

Mr. Miljko Simović provided a contextual overview of the situation in Serbia and outlined some of the measures taken to control SALW and – in extension – armed violence. Legal measures involve increasing the tax on legal weapons. He pointed out that there is a decrease in demand for possession of weapons with the increase of the standard of living in Serbia. The number of legal SALW in civilian possession decreased by 250,000. Previously, Serbian legislation did not differentiate between the possession and carry of arms, which has since been addressed. **Ms. Jasmina Roskić, Head of Department, Ministry of Trade, Tourism, and Telecommunications**, added that Serbia has ratified the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), has maintained an active participation in discussing the ATT reporting template, and is the third most transparent country in the world when it comes to reporting on exports and imports.

DAY TWO

SESSION III: TRACKING ILLICIT POSSESSION – SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Participants offered an overview of their efforts to track illicit possession.

Mr. Selaudin Korkuti, Chief of Armament Sector, State Police noted that Albania is a transit as well as an origin country, with illicit firearms heading towards Western Europe, usually from Albania through Kosovo*. Some of the weapons trafficked are SALW from the military storages that were ransacked in 1997. One issue of concern is the presence of gas pistols, procured in Turkey and then converted and trafficked to the Western Balkans. There are also instances of trafficking of weapons from Albania to Greece, especially Kalashnikovs. The means of concealment include cars or specially designed compartments, with smugglers traveling alone or with their families (to avoid profiling), usually between the ages of 25-45. Using its awareness of smuggling routes and having an overview of smuggling cases, the Albanian Government took measures to improve their legislation and penal code.

Mr. Ermin Pešto noted that Bosnia and Herzegovina has been identified as a transit route country. Overall, he explained that the situation of illicit SALW possession in BiH is under control, although there are sporadic occurrences where certain groups attempt to transfer weapons to Scandinavian countries but both groups and trends are usually quickly identified. He also pointed out that though there are a lot of SALW in the region, it is often referred to as being in a direr situation than in reality. Mr. Pešto concluded by reiterating that due to the complex political situation in BiH, it is difficult to monitor data, although they are constantly processing any data available.

Dr. Zveržhanovski again stressed the need and importance of data collection on SALW in the region in order to be able to document the progress. He said that lot of progress has been made and the increase of demand for convertible weapons shows the reduced availability of weapons.

Mr. Mensur Hoti noted that the SALW Commissions face similar situations in their own contexts, and that converted gas weapons are of concern to the entire region. He urged all present to continue developing activities to combat the illicit transfer of firearms as well as continue sharing experiences – emphasizing the

police officers agreement proposed in Ohrid for combatting illegal SALW. Mr. Hoti pointed out that illicit trade is not a huge concern but that authorities do maintain a database in which they register illicit weapons seized by the Police.

Mr. Alain Lapon, Project Manager, Technical Advisor, emphasized the importance of legislation and penal codes creating incentives to not commit these crimes.

Ms. Anita Tomovska, Chief Analyst of Department for Statistical Research and Documentation / Sector for Criminal Intelligence and Analysis, reported to the group on the latest developments in the field of trafficking and possession of illicit arms from 2010-2014. She noted that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is a country of origin, transit, as well as destination. From 2010-2014, a total of 1,017 crimes related to illegal manufacture, possession, and sale of weapons and explosives were uncovered, with a total of 1,157 perpetrators. A total of 2,141 weapons and 51,061 pieces of ammunition were seized during the reporting period. Illicit weapons are suspected to enter from Albania, Kosovo*, and Serbia Police found a total of 147 converted guns and also discovered a conversion workshop near Tetovo. Ms. Tomovska concluded by emphasizing the importance of border controls.

Mr. Gheorghe Alcaz offered statistical data for 2015. He noted that as a way of combatting illicit SALW, checks on possession of SALW were carried out for natural persons as well as for legal entities. 102 weapons have been voluntarily surrendered during 2015. In addition, a criminal group trafficking weapons, munitions, and drugs was dismantled. The authorities in Moldova have also noted that there is a possibility that weapons are procured in Transnistria since weapons have been seized in the borderland regions that are currently not under the control of Moldova. Mr. Alcaz also mentioned several means of cooperation activities to combat the illicit possession of SALW, including the European Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine; the VELES project initiated by the South East Law Enforcement Center; and a simulation exercise which was carried out in Serbia in April 2015. He concluded by noting legislative amendments covering this area.

Mr. Mladen Marković informed participants of statistics on incidents of violence and firearms seized in criminal activities – and the numbers of convictions and charges filed in these instances. In addition, Mr Marković presented demographic indicators of perpetrators and victims of firearms incidents. He recommended that authorities urge legislative organs to work on execution of penalties for these cases. In Montenegro, illicit trade is considered a micro crime, and any illicit trade with Albania, BiH or other neighbours is not interesting for criminals since it does not accumulate a considerable amount of money. Mr. Marković similarly noted that most of the firearms seized are part of other crimes and used by criminal groups for security.

Mr. Miljko Simović noted that Serbia maintains an electronic register on citizen searches and investigations. This register, is different from the register of licenses for legally owned firearms. In addition, Mr. Simović pointed out that illicit SALW were once legal, so the focus should be on legal firearms in order to determine changing chains of ownership. He reiterated that there was only one weapons producer in former Yugoslavia but the members of the police and army were from all over the country. He informed that authorities are working to make sanctions for the illicit trade of weapons more stringent. Serbia is also taking steps to sanction gas sprays. Mr. Simović noted that there is a special department dealing with illicit trade and smuggling. Their focus is more on drug-related crime but when there are drugs, there are guns. Finally, he concluded by noting that there has been a reduction of seized weapons.

SESSION IV: TACKLING ILLICIT POSSESSION – REGISTRATION/RECORDKEEPING/MARKING

Mr. Selaudin Korkuti informed that Albania uses a local software for registering all types of arms according to their use and serial number, with the aim to manage information on SALW from entry into market to end user. It also includes records on all weapons seized or lost. This is part of a strategy to better monitor records on arms. Mr. Korkuti said that the new Law on Arms requires for individuals to be registered as well – as per the EU Stabilization and Association Agreement. He then explained the implementation system of the registry before turning to challenges, which include combining the system with the ballistic system, and ensuring all ID numbers are entered correctly. Mr. Korkuti concluded by requesting SEESAC's support in organizing an awareness-raising campaign on weapons as well as procuring a record keeping registry of bullets and scanners for the border crossing points.

Mr. Ermin Pešto again reiterated the complicated constitutional structure of BiH and the absence of defined rules on registration at the state level. However, the records they have include data on people carrying arms – which is also kept by the Ministry of Security in Sarajevo. Mr. Pešto suggested that there is useful data available from BiH but that needs to be consolidated. He informed that the Ministry of Defence will prepare data for the next SALW Commissions meeting.

Mr. Mensur Hoti informed that Kosovo* has functional database used for registering all types of weapons, and that they track them from the moment they are ordered for purchase to the end user – whether civilian or a state institution. Similarly he explained that all firearms entering Kosovo* must be marked and tested otherwise these cannot be placed on the market.

Ms. Lidija Petrova Mojsovska, Head of Unit, Ministry of Interior, outlined the relevant legislative framework and the weapons registration and recordkeeping system in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In order to have only one database for tracing arms – as prescribed by legislative changes – authorities are currently conducting a re-registration process for weapons owned by natural and legal entities – which will be finalized in 2017. A law on marking and the checking of firearms was adopted in 2010, but this does not cover legal entities, for which special provisions apply. Firearms and ammunition produced by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have to be marked and tested before entering the market, and the same goes for imported SALW. Ms. Petrova Mojsovska concluded with the provisions on procedures outlined in the Law on Marking and the Checking of Firearms.

Mr. Gheorghe Alcaz gave an overview of the legislative and normative framework in Moldova and described the intricacies of the State Arms Register which is a centralized recording system of weapons in the possession of civilians and legal entities – from entry to the physical destruction or export of weapons. All territorial police inspectorates in Moldova have access to this register. The register also connects licensed dealers for the import and sale of weapons. Mr. Alcaz noted that currently, only the units that track weapons have access to the register but that authorities are working to change this so that all relevant actors have access. He concluded by delineating the provisions set out for marking weapons. Further requests for clarifications on the marking of firearms were requested by the participants.

Ms. Mira Radović described the legislative framework in Montenegro and the weapons electronic register. She mentioned different activities aiming to reduce the number of weapons in civilian possession, including changing the administrative tax as well as the "Respect Life, Return Weapons" collection campaign, which will continue until 2017. She also noted that Montenegro has prohibited carrying of arms in public, with the exception of security institution staff. Ms. Radović informed on the requirements for marking, records, and the safekeeping of SALW. Her intervention was followed by questions on the safe storage of SALW in production facilities.

Mr. Miljko Simović informed that Serbia has two laws on marking, and an institute for marking weapons. He also noted that Serbia is not yet a member of CIP but that they hope to accomplish this through diplomatic channels by 2018. Similarly, Serbia is not a member of the Wassenaar Arrangement, but have taken initiatives to join. He outlined some innovative changes, including chips to be integrated into weapons documentation.

SESSION V: TACKLING ILLICIT POSSESSION – COLLECTION AND LEGALIZATION CAMPAIGNS

Mr. Krunoslav Katić, Human Security Consultant, provided a presentation on collection and legalization campaigns highlighting best practices and lessons learned from the region.

Next, **Mr. Mladen Marković, Mr. Miljko Simović**, and **Mr. Denis Selimović** gave updates on the collection and legalization campaigns implemented in their respective countries.

Lessons learned include:

- Planning of the collection/awareness campaign to start at least a year in advance;
- Ensure from the outset the political will;
- Ensure a clear and concise messaging;
- Spreading the message: avoid the use of billboards; identify the most effective awareness tools (i.e t-shirts are less useful than notebooks and pens)

CONCLUSIONS AND WRAP-UP

Dr. Ivan Zveržhanovski wrapped up the meeting expressing satisfaction on the serious engagement by participants and noting that the meeting achieved its objectives of sharing valuable information, knowledge and expertise. He reminded participants about the importance of integrating the arms control policies and interventions into the strategic development plans and strategies.

Further, he encouraged Albania and Moldova in their commitment to establish the SALW Commission and offered SEESAC's support throughout the process.

Dr. Zveržhanovski also noted that the meeting made it clear that there is a need for consolidating SALW data in the region as a baseline for the implementation of the arms control interventions but also as an important tool in documenting progress.

He noted that the meeting discussions showed the importance of regional cooperation and knowledge sharing and encouraged the participants to continue consulting each other even beyond these meetings and also make more use of the [Knowledge Exchange Platform](#).

In conclusion, he informed that the next meeting would see another discussion on a Regional SALW Strategy which could be not only a useful document to keep track of progress and challenges but also show that South East Europe is dealing with its SALW problems together as a region.