

28TH SOUTHEAST EUROPE DEFENSE MINISTERIAL MEETING ANKARA, TÜRKIYE

22 Nov 2023


Madam Chair,
Your Excellencies, Ministers, Heads of Delegations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the invitation to the meeting.
It is my honor to address this esteemed forum on behalf of UNDP SEESAC.

SEESAC is the South East and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Programme and the Governments in South East and East Europe, working within the framework of the Regional Cooperation Council. I would like to use this opportunity to inform you about our work since the last SEDM Ministerial meeting in support to Governments in the region to strengthen small arms and light weapons control and to advance gender equality in the military.

Let me first start with statistics; in the first 9 months of this year, over 2700 incidents involving firearms were recorded by the media in the Western Balkans and Chisinau. These incidents involve murders, people being threatened or injured with a firearm, suicides, celebratory shootings, accidents, including seizures of weapons. Seizures of weapons from citizens represented half of those cases. In this period, 126 people were killed, 339 injured with a firearm.

SEESAC is implementing projects funded by the EU, Germany, the United States of America, Norway, France, the Netherlands, the UK, Sweden, and Slovakia in supporting regional security cooperation and providing advisory, technical and capacity development support to jurisdictions across the region.



We facilitate the key regional cooperation processes at the strategic and operational levels dealing with arms control and combatting illicit arms trafficking. We provide support to the governments in the development of policies grounded on data harmonization of arms control legislation with the EU acquis. We support the strengthening of the detection and investigation capacities of firearms-related crimes, provide support for physical security and stockpile management of firearms and ammunition, and support awareness raising on small arms and light weapons control issues.

Apart from project activities directly implemented by SEESAC, in close partnership with the EU, Germany and France SEESAC is also coordinating the efforts of the Western Balkans authorities to implement the Regional Roadmap on combatting illicit trafficking, possession and misuse of SALW and their ammunition. The Roadmap was developed by Small arms and light weapons Commissions that include Ministries of Defence in the Western Balkans.

The Roadmap has a strong focus on physical security and stockpile management of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition and is therefore very relevant for the Ministries of Defence. Goals 6 and 7 are calling for a significant decrease of the risk of proliferation and diversion of firearms, ammunition and explosives. This is done by strengthening inspection systems and implementation the life cycle management of SALW and ammunition.

The Roadmap represents the key guiding document on small arms and light weapons control for the region. It has also inspired action outside this region. Namely, the Caribbean have followed the example provided by the Western Balkans and have developed their own Roadmap on SALW control. Moreover, the Western Balkans Roadmap has also influenced the EU action plan on firearms trafficking, as the EU Action Plan has integrated the set of key performance indicators developed by the Western Balkans. Furthermore, two weeks ago the first meeting on the development of the Roadmap for small arms and light weapons control took place in Central America, where lessons learned in the Western Balkans were shared.

The efforts of the Western Balkans and the Roadmap have been recognized also by the UN Secretary-General in his latest annual report to the Security Council on small arms and light weapons control that was just published.

The next regional Roadmap regional coordination meeting will be held on 19 and 20 December this year in Tirana and we look forward to seeing representatives of Ministries of Defence from the Western Balkans in this meeting. The meeting will enable the review of progress on the implementation of each of the goals of the Roadmap and inform on the process of developing the Revised Roadmap for implementation beyond 2024. It will also discuss contributions from implementing partners and donor support in countering the proliferation and illicit trafficking of firearms.

In preparation of the regional meeting, a series of local coordination meetings are organized in all the Western Balkans 6 – this week in Tirana and Sarajevo with participation of representatives of Ministries of Defence.

Let me briefly update you also on the project Strengthening of Regional Cooperation on Gender Equality in the Security Sector Reform, that we implement and that is funded by Norway and Slovakia.

SEESAC, in close cooperation with the Ministries of Defence in Sarajevo, Podgorica, Skopje and Belgrade, facilitates regional cooperation and supports MoDs to implement practical measures to advance gender equality in the military in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 16.

SEESAC provides practical and actionable support for advancing gender equality in the security sector. We facilitate a unique regional platform – the Regional Network of Gender Equality Mechanisms in Defence, which is enabling decision-makers and military commanders in the MoDs and AFs to share information, exchange knowledge and plan actions on integrating gender perspective in defence policies and practice. Some of you have been continuously contributing to it.

We also support the Ministries of Defence to further develop gender sensitive human resources policies and integrate the gender perspective in military training and education. Here let me commend the Ministries of Defence for the development of the regional manual on combating gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment and abuse and implementing the related measures.

It is my great pleasure to inform you that Ministries of Defence in the Western Balkans have also made a pioneering step by developing the first in the region Baseline study on integrating gender in military education and training.

As a follow-up to the study, we are also supporting the MODs in development of an online regional course on gender equality in the military that will be available to all personnel – another innovative activity this region is pioneering and should be proud of.

Advancing gender equality is a prerequisite for a modern security sector that can recognize and respond to the diverse security needs of the citizens, men and women. Integration of gender perspective in the security sector allows the security sector to better respond to complex security challenges in line with the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda.

There is no development without peace.

And there is no development without representative governance institutions that reflect the composition of societies to which they serve.

While we all understand and have highlighted here the increasingly complex security environment in which we live, we also need to constantly remind of the need for the respect of international law, the international humanitarian law, in addressing these challenges.

Lastly, let me also highlight that complex security environment requires tapping into the talent and capacities of the whole population, both women and men

Mr./Ms. Chairperson,
Distinguished representatives,

I would like to conclude this statement by reconfirming our commitment to work closely with the Secretariat and all participating nations of this forum in contributing to regional security and stability.

I would also like to thank you and your teams for your excellent cooperation in increasing small arms and light weapons control and strengthening the gender perspective in the security sector.

I will use this opportunity to thank the Minister of Defence, the Ministry of Defence of Türkiye, and the Secretariat, for the excellent organization of this Ministerial meeting and the hospitality.

Thank you.