

3rd Western Balkan Roadmap Coordination Meeting, 3 July 2020

Intervention by

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Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen, dear organizers of the 3rd Co-ordination meeting for the implementation of the Regional Roadmap for the Western Balkans.

This time round, the EEAS is addressing you directly from EU Head Quarters in Brussels. My name is Joanneke Balfoort, and I am the Director for Security and Defense Policy in the European External Action Service, the EEAS. I am, amongst other things, responsible for non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control in the EU.

Let me begin by saying a few words about the impact of Covid 19 in the area of arms control and illicit arms trafficking, and then I will address other issues.

First of all, I would like to commend the authorities in the Western Balkans for the **continuous commitment to Roadmap implementation**, despite the additional challenges and limitations brought by the Covid 19 pandemic - and in the case of authorities in Tirana working in the aftermath of an earthquake that left many killed and without homes.

The additional challenges brought by the COVID 19 crisis, in particular to law enforcement agencies, caused by both the threat of the virus and the social distance limitations in the daily work of all the institutions responding to the virus threat. An additional challenge, is also to ensure an adequate response in this situation to worrying and increasing trends of armed violence, including those related to domestic violence, which is worsened by the presence of firearms, but also to any new forms of trafficking of firearms in light of the new situation.

All of these challenges are not specific for the Western Balkans region but also in the whole European Union, but I wanted to mention them because they also impact on the implementation of the Roadmap.

And now to some other issues, the first of which is about sustained effort. Let me pay tribute to the important progress the authorities in the Western Balkans have achieved in the area of non-proliferation and arms control. This is as important for you as it is for the EU and its Member States. Your security is our security and vice-versa. For the EU, the Western Balkans is a clear priority, as we have said in our *EU Strategy Against Illicit Firearms, Small Arms & Light Weapons and their Ammunition, "Securing Arms, Protecting Citizens"* which the EU Foreign Ministers agreed in 2018.

Let me strongly emphasize the importance of a sustained effort. The **EU has been providing the continuous and comprehensive support to small arms and light weapons control in South East Europe since 2002** to address the illegal possession,

trafficking and misuse of firearms. Our support covered all aspects of arms control and supports interventions that enable improvement of policies, capacities and security infrastructure. Furthermore, support has been provided to strengthening **regional cooperation through dedicated processes** at the strategic and operational levels that enable information sharing, planning of joint activities and contribute to standardization of approaches. The Small Arms and Light Weapons Commissions process and the South East Europe Firearms Experts Network established by the region with EU support represent the **foundation of progress** in the region and are also the key processes that facilitate the implementation of the Roadmap.

The level of knowledge and good practices established in this region in SALW control is truly impressive. I hear about efforts to replicate these good practices developed in the Western Balkans in other parts of the world. I really hope that in a few years we will see this also replicated in other parts. We strongly believe that **it is thanks to this long-term approach and steady investments in the region since 2002 that the development and adoption of the Roadmap in such a short time was possible.**

I would especially like to commend the **coordination and monitoring** of the Roadmap implementation as it truly brings together all the key stakeholders – the authorities from the Western Balkans, donors and international and regional organizations – providing a platform, which is key to information exchange and coordination of efforts and resources. But the coordination can only be as efficient to the extent that stakeholders allow it, and this is possible, I can see it already,

because of all your commitment – and I would like to commend all of you for your commitment to the process.

The **Monitoring aspect** of the Roadmap implementation is another strong point – and again one that depends on contributions of all the participants. It was impressive to see the detailed reports that were prepared ahead of the meeting based on inputs of SALW commissions and all the partners. I do not think there is a similar process currently ongoing in any other area.

The value of the Roadmap process lies also in the fact that it is **fully regionally owned**. While many donors and international organizations are supporting the implementation, the process is nevertheless nationally owned and steered. The role of SEESAC, which was established by Governments in the region and UNDP to support the disarmament and arms control efforts, is also an important one – SEESAC was established with a very clear mandate to support the authorities and coordinate SALW control efforts in the region.

The EU will continue to support the efforts in the Western Balkans, which are very much in line with the *EU Strategy Against Illicit Firearms, Small Arms & Light Weapons and their Ammunition*.

The goals of the Roadmap agreed by the Western Balkans jurisdictions are fully consistent with the efforts within the Union and therefore, the Union has clearly

expressed its support to the Western Balkans on its implementation, in particular through the adoption of its two recent Council Decisions in 2018 and 2019, under implementation by SEESAC, providing substantial support to both Roadmap implementation and its coordination and monitoring mechanism. Let me express our sincere thanks to SEESAC for its professionalism and expertise, and the devotion shown by all of those involved - it is highly appreciated by the EEAS. You will perhaps know that the support to the Western Balkans is the most substantial of all on the EU's CFSP budget for non-proliferation and disarmament, which I am responsible for. This is a priority that is agreed with EU Member States, precisely because security in the Western Balkans region is very high priority on the security agenda of the EU, not least in the perspective of further enlargement.

These were the words. I thank you very much for the attention and I wish you a good meeting.

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