

Closing remarks

15th Regional Roadmap Coordination Meeting

Podgorica, 8-9 July 2026

Your Excellencies,
Dear colleagues and partners,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have come to the end of two full and productive days here in Podgorica.

We close on a symbolic occasion, as today we celebrate the **International Gun Destruction Day**. It is a quiet entry in the calendar, however it is a vital measure to reduce the proliferation and misuse of small arms. Over the years, the jurisdictions around this table have destroyed tens of thousands of weapons, which were taken out of circulation for good. There is no better place worth celebrating than around this table while taking stock of such important achievements.

Allow me to thank all of you, the SALW Commissions above all, for the depth and the honesty of your briefings. The value of a meeting like this is when the challenges are named as plainly as the achievements, and that is what we heard from you.

Cooperation of this kind matters even-more in the current moment. In a security environment of rising needs, tighter budgets and threats that keep diversifying, the discipline of sitting at one table and working together has itself become a form of security.

The Western Balkans Roadmap remains what it has long been recognised to be: a model of regional ownership, coordination and practical cooperation, studied and replicated well beyond this continent. As we witnessed during these two days, the relevance has not faded as we enter the second phase. If anything, the work grows more demanding. The easier gains are behind us. What remains is the harder task

of turning progress into permanence, cooperation into lasting capability, and commitments into security.

Let me turn to the substance of these two days.

On Goals 1 and 2, we heard where each jurisdiction stands on aligning its legal framework with the EU acquis and the UN Firearms Protocol, and on the strategic frameworks including action plans that give the Roadmap effect. The direction is encouraging. Several jurisdictions reported draft weapons laws completed or moving into adoption. A number of criminal codes now harmonized with the UN Firearms Protocol. All jurisdictions reported their SALW strategies are aligned with the Roadmap. One issue emerging clearly from the reports is that data collection is largely standardized but not yet institutionalized across police, prosecution and courts. Standardized and connected data is what turns reporting into decisions. Building systems that speak to one another across these institutions is a priority which cannot be postponed.

On Goal 3, we saw again why operational capacity sits at the heart of this Roadmap. Firearms Focal Points are now established in five jurisdictions so far and, where they are operational, they have become essential units, driving investigations, strengthening forensic and ballistic work, and deepening cooperation across the region and with EU agencies. Over the past year, every jurisdiction contributed to operational actions under EMPACT and to the South East Europe Joint Action Days, alongside Europol, INTERPOL and Frontex.

Two developments briefed here deserve to be singled out, because both carry real weight for the EU and the region.

The first is the new EU Action Plan on Firearms Trafficking for 2026 to 2030. It is being drafted, quite deliberately, along the structure and the goals of this Roadmap. Once adopted, the European Union's own plan of action will follow the very framework built here, in the Western Balkans.

This region remains a priority focus and a reference point. It is hard to imagine a clearer sign that this region is shaping European policy.

The second is the establishment of Europol's Firearms Intelligence Hub. It will bring ballistic data and records of seized firearms into shared systems that can be compared, in real time, across the EU Member States and the region. The technical work is already beginning and for the first time, a weapon examined in one of your laboratories could be matched, automatically, against traces held right across Europe and vice-versa. I encourage all jurisdictions to appoint the relevant focal points in order to carry this fantastic work forwards with colleagues from Europol.

On Goal 4, the reports showed a region taking prevention seriously. Every jurisdiction reported awareness and outreach work, each shaped to its own challenges. For example campaigns against celebratory shootings under strong slogans such as "Celebrate with your Heart, Not with your gun", efforts to prevent firearm-related domestic violence, work with young people in and around schools, and voluntary-surrender are what helped bringing thousands of weapons out of civilian hands. The six jurisdictions also came together through the Regional Awareness-Raising Task Force to strengthen this work across the region.

This matters because prevention acts before harm is done, and the indicators are showing it clearly. Firearm incidents resulting in deaths and injuries fell again, and celebratory shootings continued to decline, though they remain a concern in the summer months. Prevention seldom draws attention, yet it does much of the quiet work of keeping weapons from being used at all, easing the pressure that would otherwise reach police, prosecutors and courts.

Deactivation deserves particular attention, as an area where legislation, oversight and everyday practice still need to move into alignment.

On Goal 5, we heard about the disposal and destruction of surplus, confiscated and collected weapons, ammunition and explosives, and about the security of storage. On International Gun Destruction Day, those reports gave the theme real substance, with further destruction of confiscated weapons and of surplus stockpiles, including tens of tonnes of surplus ammunition and explosives, alongside steady upgrades to storage security. And one figure deserves to be heard on a day like today: the number of weapons lost or stolen across the region fell again in 2025, to roughly a

quarter of the level reported just two years ago. Still, weapons and ammunition remain a responsibility long after they leave circulation, and only secure storage and their (timely) destruction can finally lay that risk to rest.

That last point is the essence of what we mean by sustainability, and it ran through every session of these two days.

Sustainability is not a slogan.

It is people. It is processes. It is technology.

Sustaining capability is not a single act. It is a continuous one.

People must be retained, and their experience passed on.

Processes must be applied, reviewed, and refined.

Technology must be maintained, kept current, and used to its full potential.

Let me be equally clear about the European Union's part in this.

You are not alone. The European Union will continue to stand with you, as it has for more than two decades.

But partnership works best when ownership is clear.

As the Roadmap matures, it is natural that its leadership should rest ever more firmly within the region itself, and that the capacities built together are increasingly sustained through national and regional resources. As the donor landscape changes, co-funding and national budget planning will become an increasingly important part of sustainability. We will walk this path alongside you, as we always have. And the further you lead, the further, together, we will go.

Let me close with an appreciation note to all actors involved.

I would like to thank the speakers who opened this meeting, to the SALW Commissions, once again, for their comprehensive reports over these two days, and to the chairs who steered each session.

I would not want to conclude without thanking the SEESAC team, working behind the scenes on the substantive and logistical preparation of these two days.

And please join me in thanking the interpreters and technicians for their tireless work. For those of you now travelling, I wish you a safe journey home.

Thank you.