

**High-Level Meeting on Countering Firearms Trafficking in South East Europe
Implementing the Specific Actions for South East Europe of the EU Action Plan on Firearms Trafficking
2020-2025, including the Implementation of the Roadmap for comprehensive Small Arms and Light
Weapons control in the Western Balkans**

Conclusions of the Chairs

The EU/European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, together with the co-chairs of the Berlin Process

- 1) welcome the considerable progress achieved during the first years of the Western Balkans SALW Roadmap implementation, noting that the Western Balkans SALW Roadmap has become an integral part of the EU Action Plan on Firearms Trafficking since 2020. Therefore, the progress reflects effective work that the EU and the Western Balkans do together on small arms and light weapons control. This underlines the importance of our ever-increasing cooperation to address shared security challenges;
- 2) welcome and strongly support the statements of the Western Balkan partners expressing their firm commitment to continue pursuing the implementation of the Western Balkan SALW Roadmap, including beyond 2024, in line with the overall targets, the key findings and recommendations of the Mid-Term Review and mindful of a changing security environment;
- 3) thank the authorities of the Western Balkans for ensuring the continued strong ownership and commitment to advancing this jointly-supported initiative, and express equal appreciation for the EU Member States ministers/representatives' confirmation of their support and alignment with the overarching priorities of the EU Action Plan;
- 4) positively noted the recognition by the Mid-Term Review of the effectiveness and relevance of the Western Balkan SALW Roadmap, as well as the implementation progress reported, among other also in the progress reports regarding the seven goals of the Western Balkan SALW Roadmap that have been incorporated into the relevant Small Arms Light Weapons Control strategies in each Western Balkan partner. Whilst work lies ahead for the second half of the Roadmap implementation until end 2024, the EU and the co-chairs of the Berlin Process are particularly pleased to note progress with respect to:
 - a) the ongoing harmonization efforts of the legal framework with the EU acquis and UN Firearms Protocol;
 - b) the evidence-based and gender responsive approach established in formulating arms control policies and practices;

- c) the ongoing operationalization of the Firearms Focal Points by most of the Western Balkan partners, essential for their key role in improving the intelligence picture of firearms misuse and trafficking;
 - d) the improved exchange of information, and strengthened law enforcement cooperation within the region and with EU Member States and Agencies;
 - e) the enhanced investigation capacities for firearm-related crimes, including ballistic capabilities;
 - f) the increased detection capacities related to firearms, ammunition and explosives at borders, as well as the support in equipment, training and procedures;
 - g) further enhanced security of stockpiles of weapons and ammunition and
 - h) continuous seizures and confiscation of illegal weapons;
- 5) Recognize that the Western Balkan SALW Roadmap conveys also a strong signal of cooperation among the Western Balkan partners and with the EU; a firm political commitment to the EU accession process both from the jurisdictions as well as from the European Union; and a pledge to jointly tackle the proliferation of SALW. The participants of the High-Level Meeting also underlined the need for a similar level of political and diplomatic support to maintain the progress through the second phase of implementation;
- 6) recall that to support the fulfillment of the objectives of the EU Action Plan and the goals of the Western Balkan SALW Roadmap, the EU will continue to discuss and monitor the steps taken in view of implementing the action plan, including in Justice and Home Affairs Sub-Committee meetings and annual country reports as well as in the accession negotiations in particular under Chapter 24 – Justice, freedom and security;
- 7) remain committed to providing financial assistance to the region and note in this respect the recently adopted Council Decision 2022/2321 that provides support for a new phase of the UNDP SEESAC project including the coordination and monitoring of the Roadmap and its implementation, which will build upon the basis of the achievements of the previous decisions, such as the most recent ones - the Council Decision 2018/1788, and the Council Decision 2019/2111 that both provide support for SEESAC's SALW-control work in South East and East Europe thereby also contributing to the implementation of the Roadmap in addition to the EU Council Decision 2021/2133 implemented by the OSCE. Furthermore, also note that the ongoing Commission-funded regional project started on since 2021 with UNDP SEESAC as main implementer directly complements the current work, and builds on the work previously implemented with the support of the EU through EU Council Decisions and is another important EU contribution to the already ongoing range of efforts in most of these areas;
- 8) welcome the equally important and crucial financial support provided by other donors through the various funding mechanisms including to the Multi Partner Trust Fund in the implementation of the Western Balkan SALW Roadmap and the additional pledge of support announced in the High-Level Meeting. The new pledge significantly increase available funding, specifically for the Multi Partner Trust Fund. This allows the required careful planning

of new projects to address remaining challenges, contributes to the increased awareness of the implementation across the region and ensures continuation of support by implementing international organizations and donors.

- 9) take note of the implementation challenges presented by UNDP SEESAC (see presentation attached as annex) during the conference as well as jurisdictions and other implementing organisations, in particular the need for further strengthening of the institutional capacities for the implementation of the existing legal framework and further harmonization with the EU acquis and of the expressed needs for support in this area. The need for a strengthened and efficient response from the judiciary in firearms related criminal cases by further improving capacities of prosecutors in leading investigations was also stressed;
- 10) also recognize the key role of Small Arms and Light Weapons Control Commissions in coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the Roadmap at the level of jurisdictions has been highlighted; the substantive value of the comprehensive coordination and monitoring mechanism established by UNDP SEESAC and in cooperation with the authorities in the Western Balkans, the EU, Germany and France as well as the commitment of all partners involved towards it, with the aim of ensuring the efficient use of both efforts and resources as well as close monitoring of the implementation progress of the Western Balkans Roadmap and the jurisdictions action plans;
- 11) recognize that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has increased the threat of firearms trafficking in Ukraine, to the EU and towards other regions. At the High-Level Meeting, states expressed their will to continue enhancing Moldova's and Ukraine's ongoing efforts in this area, including in terms of funding expertise and equipment. Building alliances to counter the diversion of weapons complements our continuous military support to Ukraine. We are also mindful of the disinformation campaigns launched by Russia regarding this threat. It needs to be underlined that no large scale firearms trafficking in relation to the war has been identified;
- 12) note that the conference reconfirmed the key priority areas, which include alignment of legal frameworks with the EU acquis and other international agreements, strengthening border security, strengthening capacities for firearms-related investigations, including full operationalization of the firearms focal points, enhancing the effectiveness of judicial systems regarding firearms-related crimes, further facilitating operational cooperation and exchange of information among law enforcement agencies, reducing illegal possession of firearms and decreasing the risk of proliferation and diversion of firearms, ammunition and explosives, and ensuring the sustainability of the established capacities;
- 13) recall that making progress in the goals of the Western Balkan SALW Roadmap is of key importance for other priority policies such as the fight against terrorism (including the

implementation of the Joint Action Plans (JAP) on Counter-Terrorism for the Western Balkans) as well as the fight against organised crime. We welcome in this respect the actions performed under the EMPACT firearms Operational Action Plan and the active participation and commitment of our Western Balkans partners in these different actions, and underline the need for good coordination of all relevant activities. Working together to address these common threats requires a holistic approach;

- 14) re-confirm the EU's continuous and comprehensive support to small arms and light weapons control in South East and East Europe, which it initiated in 2002, reflecting the high priority the EU places on the security of the region within its security agenda.