

3rd Western Balkan Roadmap Coordination Meeting, 3 July 2020

**Opening Remarks by
Head of Political Department, Mr. Amer Kapetanovic,
Regional Cooperation Council**

Congratulations to the authorities for their commitment to Roadmap implementation process and their readiness to meet and update each other and the key stakeholders on progress and challenges.

This whole exercise has been rightly pointed out previously, it is actually a manifestation of regional ownership cooperation and commitment to the EU values and standards. That is very important at least from the perspective of the RCC. We are delighted to provide a framework and political umbrella to this process, same as we do with some other similar activities and projects such as integrative and intel security governance and others in region that does help crosscutting and synergic engagement with broader regional home affairs. To my humble opinion 4 things make the Western Balkans SALW Control Roadmap process unique and role model as we heard from Marcus for similar other activities in the region but globally as well:

First, it is a long-term strategic commitment and dedication that started in 2002 by the Governments in the region who developed the Regional Implementation Plan on Combatting the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons.

Secondly, it is the **EU accession process** that gave them additional motivation to intensify the efforts and resulted in the development of the Roadmap.

Third very important, strong support of Germany and France both politically and financially but also the support of the EU. These are key essential ingredients for the success of this process.

Forth, the process has been so far well streamlined without overlapping in full coordination with National SALW Commissions. I am underlining this in full coordination with National SALW Commissions. One thing that I would like to highlight from the Western Balkans perspective is the **importance of national ownership for all the projects that are developed and implemented within the Roadmap context** – and I would like to invite all the implementing partners to keep **close contact with the national SALW commissions when developing new initiatives**. This is an absolute must in order to ensure that efforts are building on what has already been achieved, that initiatives are developed in a way to complement each other; and to ensure sustainability of results and the most efficient use of resources. Therefore, all this is not surprising, that this initiative and this project is clearly recognized even at the last EU – Western Balkans online summit under the Croatian chairmanship that clearly put in its declaration **“the fight against the illicit trafficking of weapons provides an excellent example of how we can increase our security when we work together towards a common objective”**. So common objectives and cooperation is what citizens in WB want us to do. Since 2016 we conducted public opinion sentiment, public opinion survey called Balkan Barometer. Since 2016 we questioned more than 40000 people across the region. In this year 2020 sample is around 6000 people

(different age, sex, ethnic groups). There are some lessons learnt and some steady curves but also some surprises, for ex. the appetite for the regional cooperation is growing steadily. Now more than 70% of people think that regional cooperation in different lines and fields is a key prerequisite for better life in the region. Additionally, they still perceive security challenges as very worrisome and they still think that the governments and institutions can do more in order to sort out these problems. For the second time we have included some questions related to small arms and light weapons (you can find details on our webpage). 50% of people are worried about misuse of firearms in the region which is again clear indication of the trajectory that we need to follow. What is worrisome is that 2/3 majority of responses perceive immigration as direct security threat. In some economies in the region is more than 80%. This is something that we must take into the consideration. It is a clear indicator of what is going on. As the RCC is ready to embark on the regional economic area strategy 'volume 2' we have come to the conclusion that we cannot do it this time without linking security cooperation to socioeconomic reforms. It has to be a clear, strong package most probably built around 4 freedoms: goods, services, people and capital. Under the framework of the Berlin process we are more than aware of this segment of SALW Control. Other segments of security cooperation need to find their place and we will make sure that they do so. Let me conclude by saying that we will continue providing political guidelines which is and will be in full sync with EU values and standards and will serve as an engine to speed up accession of all WB 6 to the EU.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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