

CLOSING REMARKS

13th Regional Coordination Meeting on the implementation of the Roadmap for a Sustainable Solution to the Legal Possession, Misuse and Trafficking of SALW, their Ammunition and Explosives in the Western Balkans

Dear colleagues, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

We have come to the end of the 13th Regional Coordination Meeting, held here in charming Sarajevo, a city that reminded us this week how unpredictable the weather can be. We arrived during a heatwave, and today feels like a true autumn day.

Nonetheless, the weather did not prevent us from having a very successful meeting, marking the completion of the first phase of the Western Balkans SALW Control Roadmap. It is also symbolic that we are gathered in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the place where the first Regional Roadmap Coordination Meeting was held in Tarcin, back in May 2019.

Allow me to express my sincere gratitude to all of you for your valuable contributions and dedicated work, strong commitment and engagement throughout the first phase of the Roadmap. Your efforts have been instrumental in making this initiative both successful and globally recognized. As we conclude this meeting, I would like to briefly highlight some key takeaways from these two productive days:

- The successful implementation of the Roadmap is a direct result of the strong spirit of **cooperation** among all the partners involved, the institutions, donors, the regional and international organizations.
- **Cooperation like the one here under the Western Balkans Roadmap is especially significant** bearing in mind the threats deriving from an increasingly challenging geopolitical environment, marked by rising needs, shrinking resources and diversified threats.
- I would also like to stress the importance of your continued commitment to this important regional initiative, with the endorsement of the SALW Control Roadmap for implementation period 2025-2030 being another demonstration of the exemplary model of cooperation coming from this region.

- Ongoing work in the implementation of the roadmap was reported in particular towards harmonization of legal framework with EU Acquis and compliance with the UN Firearms Protocol, with three jurisdictions already reporting full compliance with the UN Protocol. Additionally, we also heard that the remaining three jurisdictions are actively working on finalizing the process of adopting amendments to their criminal codes. **Concrete challenges were highlighted by several jurisdictions in completing these processes and the requests for support in several areas were noted.**
- We also took note of the activities at both policy and law enforcement level throughout the region, in particular the progress reported in enhancing the capacities of the **Firearms Focal Points where these are already established** and how these have become essential units in ensuring improved investigations but also contributing to a more proactive approach in operational cooperation with EU law enforcement agencies, yielding concrete results, which we heard about in detail during the first day.
- Significant ongoing efforts in increasing **detection capacities** to counter illicit trafficking of firearms were reported by all jurisdictions, and I would like to once more commend you on the reported results.
- At the previous meeting, we kept note of the announcement that EU Member States had agreed to begin collecting data under **KPI 5**. For the first time, we received such data from an EU Member State - Sweden, which marks an important moment for the Roadmap implementation.
- Another area of progress centered around awareness-raising on the dangers of firearms within Goal 4. We heard about ongoing awareness raising campaigns in all jurisdictions and we encourage these impressive efforts in order to further reduce the negative impact of firearms in our societies.
- Additionally, positive trends in voluntarily surrender of firearms were continued in 2024. It is important to highlight again that during the first phase of the Roadmap, almost 300,000 firearms were voluntarily surrendered. Congratulations again on this result!

- It was highlighted once more through the updates in the last but not least important session, that if SALW and ammunition are not properly governed and managed, they may proliferate, deteriorate and create security and safety risks. Important work was reported from each of you in reducing this risk through increasing the security of the storages but also ensuring destruction of those in surplus or confiscated.
- Today, as we mark International Gun Destruction Day, I would like to commend you for the destruction of over 65,000 weapons during the first phase of the Roadmap.
- We also noted the renewed commitment of funding support by EU Member States through the Multi Partner Trust Fund and extend an invitation to donors to further contribute to this fund in order to ensure a donor coordinated approach and continued implementation of the Roadmap. We also note with thanks, the new significant contribution to the implementation of the Roadmap, in particular the most recent one announced by the Netherlands.
- All these results become especially important if we take into account the conditions in which the implementation of the I phase of the Roadmap took place, highlighting the COVID 19 pandemic, earthquakes with devastating consequences, cyberattacks, war in Ukraine, as some of the key strains in the process. However, strong ownership, solid foundation of regional cooperation, close coordination of efforts and resources, quality expert support provided by the implementing international organizations have been essential in making the Western Balkans Roadmap a model of successful regional approach to SALW control.
- Allow me also to thank you again for your openness and readiness to share this experience, both the challenges and results with counterparts from farther regions coming from Kyrgyzstan, Cambodia and in this meeting from **Honduras**. Allow me to extend my thanks again to the delegation of Honduras for their attendance and important contribution to this meeting.
- Let me conclude by also extending my sincere gratitude to the respected speakers at the **opening session for their inspiring speeches**, to the **SALW Commissions** for the very comprehensive reports during these two days but also to the **chairs of the different sessions**.

- Given that the word cooperation was mentioned so many times during this meeting, let us continue building on the momentum of this event and continue cooperate towards achieving our common goal for a Safer Region, Europe and beyond.
- Last but not least, let me thank the team working in organizing all the complex logistics for this meeting Ana, Marija and Andreja for their tireless efforts behind the logistics of this meeting, Igor for ensuring the visibility of all your efforts. But also to the colleagues working around the clock in the consolidation and preparation of the several regional reports and knowledge products ahead of this meeting Nenad, Violeta, Majlinda and Edin.
- I would like also to thank the interpreters and technicians for their tireless work in this meeting.

Lastly, for those of you travelling wishing you a safe trip, while I know that most of you are still staying here for the regional meeting of SALW commissions tomorrow where you will be accompanied by colleagues from Moldova and Ukraine.