



AR/110

15 May 2008

SEESAC ACTIVITY REPORT – AR/110

SEESAC ROUNDTABLE ON FIREARMS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEGISLATION BELGRADE, SERBIA, 08 MAY 2008

SEESAC FUNCTIONAL AREA	FA 2 - Legislative and Regulatory Issues FA 3 - Management Information FA 4 – SALW Awareness and Communications Strategy
SEESAC OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY	OA 1 - Capacity Building OA 3 - Information Management and Exchange Activities OA 7 - Training and Research

Available data suggests that domestic violence is a widespread phenomenon throughout the Western Balkans, having increased further following the conflicts of the 1990s. Anecdotal evidence from women's shelters and media monitoring shows that firearms are frequently used in cases of domestic violence, primarily to threaten the victim but in extreme cases also to injure or kill. SEESAC undertook research in 2007 to see how the legal frameworks regulating domestic violence and civilian possession and acquisition of firearms could be better aligned in order to protect victims and contribute to the prevention of armed domestic violence, resulting in the report, 'Firearms and Domestic Violence in the Western Balkans: A Comparative Study of Legislation and Implementation Mechanisms'. This work is part of SEESAC's broader Strategy on Gender Issues in Arms Control and Armed Violence Prevention, which aims to address arms control issues from a gendered perspective.



The report was launched at the Regional Conference on Domestic Violence in Sofia, Bulgaria in February 2008. It included recommendations for Governments and civil society at the regional and national level. Follow-up activities at the national level aimed at implementing the recommendations of the report have commenced or are planned:

- ❑ Findings and recommendations of the research have been presented at the National Domestic Violence Conference in Serbia and the Annual Conference of the Victimology Society of Serbia;
- ❑ Recommendations for changes in legislation related to firearms have been explicitly included in the Provincial Strategy against Domestic Violence in Vojvodina;
- ❑ Draft proposals for legal changes to the relevant laws in the Republic of Serbia have been developed;
- ❑ Roundtables/press briefings are being planned in Albania and Montenegro.

The objectives of the Roundtable in Serbia were to:

1. Present the main findings, conclusions and recommendations of the study report on firearms and domestic violence, in particular as they relate to Serbia;
2. Present and discuss the draft proposals for legal changes to relevant legislation related to firearms possession and domestic violence.



The roundtable was well attended, despite the timing just before Serbia's Parliamentary elections, by representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, relevant Government Ministries, the national and provincial Offices of the Ombudspersons, the Secretariat of Labour, Employment and Gender Equality within the Executive Council of Vojvodina, the Association of Judges, the Association of Misdemeanour Judges, the Police Academy, the administration of the Women's Prison in Pozarevac, the civil sector (women's NGOs and human rights NGOs) and UNDP Serbia. Observers were also invited from government and civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro.

The proposals for legal change were well received and supported, with only one minor suggestion for change. In general participants were extremely supportive of the need for changes and offered several practical suggestions for moving forward with the proposals. Participants also made suggestions for improving the implementation of relevant existing legislation. The recommendations for legal changes will now be sent to the National Assembly, the Government and all relevant institutions, including Parliamentary Committees. A representative from the Office of the Ombudsperson, which is authorised to propose legal changes, also suggested using this office as an additional channel from which to submit the proposals.

Representatives from the observer countries displayed much interest in the progress that has been achieved in Serbia and confirmed their intention to support similar processes in their countries. SEESAC will actively follow-up on this in cooperation with local UNDP Country Offices.



For more information about the roundtable or SEESAC's work on firearms and domestic violence in general, please contact SEESAC SALW Awareness Officer, Ms. Ciara Loughney (ciara.loughney@undp.org).

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