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The European Commission's action against firearms trafficking

Fabio Marini

Head of the Task Force on Firearms Trafficking

European Commission DG HOME

- The illicit trafficking of firearms is a highly complex area with a clear cross-border dimension. No country is unaffected. And six in ten Europeans actually believe that the level of crime involving firearms is likely to increase over the next five years.
- Most legally-held firearms are used for legitimate purposes by law-abiding people, who own them for hunting, sports shooting for instance.
- But it is also true that a large amounts of powerful military grade weapons have since the mid-1990s reached the EU from the Western Balkans and

former Soviet Bloc countries, often trafficked in small quantities and hidden in vehicles like long distance coaches to avoid detection. Recent upheavals in North Africa and the Middle East carry a risk that surplus and stolen military arms will reach European criminal markets along similar routes.

- Firearms, parts and components are also, to an increasing extent, traded online and delivered through mail order, postal or express delivery services. Law enforcement authorities in the EU are concerned that firearms which have been deactivated are being illegally reactivated and sold for criminal purposes.
- The EU is uniquely placed to help disrupt such criminal markets through its laws and funding streams, through police and customs cooperation and engagement with third countries and international organisations.

- That is why the Commission is proposing a comprehensive blueprint for Europe to act together in protecting the legal sale and ownership of firearms, and preventing gun-related crime.
- And on 21 October the Commission adopted a Communication setting out, for the first time, a blueprint on how the EU can, in the one hand, better tackle gun-related crime, while, on the other hand, protecting the legal sale and ownership of firearms by responsible and law-abiding citizens.
- This document has taken stock, from a law enforcement perspective, of existing EU actions to reduce trafficking in firearms and presents how the European Commission sees future steps in this area.
- In the coming years we must look at whether and how we can strengthen the legislation, how to step up operational cooperation between law enforcement services, and how to work better in

and with third countries to stem the inflow of illicit arms.

- We will therefore consider actions along three streamlines.
- The first streamline is considering an assessment of EU legislation which aims at safeguarding the licit market for civilian firearms through new EU standards on which firearms can be sold for civilian use, how firearms should be marked, and how to licence persons who wish to possess and to use firearms.
- This assessment aims also to consider actions for reducing diversion of firearms into criminal hands through the development of effective standards on safe storage of civilian firearms and on how to deactivate civilian and military firearms, and greater efforts to reduce illicit trafficking of firearms (whether civilian or military) from outside the EU.

- A common approach to marking firearms with unique serial numbers when they are manufactured could help tracing the almost million reported missing weapons.
- Deactivation requirements and replica licensing rules differ throughout the EU, so EU action in this area could result in better and safer deactivation processes and licensing and disposal rules that are easier to understand, wherever you are in the EU.
- This evaluation of EU legislation is complemented by an assessment of the need for common EU rules on which offences linked to firearms should be criminalised and what level of criminal sanctions should be imposed by Member States. We want in fact to be sure that deterrence works in all Member States and that there are no legal loopholes for the traffickers.
- These sanctions could address illicit manufacture, trafficking, tampering with markings, illegal

possession of a firearm and intent to supply firearms.

- A second streamline aims at increasing pressure on criminal markets through better cross-border cooperation between police, customs and border guards.
- On an operational level the Council of the EU has established the European Firearms Expert group to promote information exchange and cooperation and in 2010 adopted an action plan to facilitate tracing and cooperation against firearms trafficking.
- Member States and the Commission, on the basis of Europol's 2013 EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment, have made the disruption of illicit manufacturing and trafficking in firearms one of the EU's nine law enforcement priorities for 2014-17.

- An overall plan for a coherent operational action has been devised by firearms police and customs experts in Member States and Europol as part of the policy cycle.
- This plan includes initiatives to collect and share of information on firearms crime; police control operations to tackle the principal sources and routes of illegal firearms; a programme of joint police customs operations under the direction of Member States and Europol and with the participation of the Commission.
- I would like particularly stress the action, which is also included in this Plan, to support setting of Firearms Expert Network in Westerner Balkans and the commitment to continue to collaborate with the Western Balkans Countries to increase the flow of information and intelligence in both directions regarding the illicit trafficking of firearms.

- The third streamline of our Strategy aims at building better intelligence by gathering and sharing more information on firearms crimes, and by targeted training of law enforcement officers.
- The European Commission and Europol have started an activity for the definition of minimum standard intelligence requirements in coherence with other similar activities run by UNODC and Interpol.
- In terms of external action, the European Commission has very much welcomed the successful EU ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and of the UN Firearms Protocol.
- These decisions represent the most tangible evidence of the EU's real engagement in the fight against the trafficking in firearms.
- We firmly believe that the widely and effectively implementation of these two international



instruments can make a significant difference in making legal international firearms transfers more responsible and transparent, and in combatting the illegal trade in conventional arms.

- Let me also recall the important results of EU strategy adopted in 2005 to combat the illicit accumulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition.

The strategy set down three principles underpinning the EU's action in the field of small arms and light weapons – prevention, cooperation with partners and support to multilateralism. This complemented and contributed to the implementation of the UN Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons and the International Tracing Instrument by combining all the instruments and policies available to the EU for tackling all facets of the firearms issue.

- A total of around 21m EUR from different EU budget lines was deployed in 2011-13 to support disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration and to counter illicit trafficking in firearms and small arms and light weapons around the world. For example, the EU is supporting physical security and stockpile management activities in Libya and the wider region, the South-Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, regional centres for firearms control in Central America (CASAC) and Africa (RECSA),
- In the light of the latest threat assessments, the EU will continue to provide assistance to neighbouring countries and to conflict and post-conflict areas around the world to prevent the diversion, theft and trafficking of small arms and light weapons through more robust national arms export control systems.
- Let me remind that on 9 December 2013, the Council of the European Union adopted Council

Decision to help to further increase stockpile security, destroy SALW and their ammunition, improve marking and tracing of SALW, foster closer regional cooperation on SALW issues and support the collection of illegal SALW held by the population of South East European countries.

- While full-scale implementation of the Council Decision has started in January 2014, some preliminary activities already took place in late 2013. In particular, with the aim of facilitating the creation of a regional Firearms Experts Network in South East Europe, SEESAC and the French Embassy in Belgrade co-organised a regional seminar on Combating Illicit Trafficking in Firearms in South East Europe, in Podgorica, Montenegro on 26 – 28 November 2013.
- As a result of the discussions a decision was taken to initiate a process of consultations with the relevant national authorities as a step towards establishing a regional experts network to combat

illicit trafficking in firearms within which police, justice and customs services would be represented.

- Finally on 19-20 December 2013 in Budva, Montenegro, at the EU-Western Balkans Ministerial Forum on Justice and Home Affairs, all parties agreed on a proposal of the Commission to set up a network of regional expert to combat illicit trafficking in firearms, within which police, justice and customs services would be represented. SEESAC will act as the Secretariat of this network.
- .As soon as we will be informed about the composition of this network of regional experts, the European Commission is ready to call for a joint Conference in Brussels gathering EU Firearms experts and experts of the Western Balkans network to discuss the details of an operational cooperation.
- We believe that this cooperation could consider, among others, a plan of joint operations on specific

subjects linked to the fight the supply chain of illicit firearms in the Balkans and a comprehensive training curriculum for law enforcement officials.

- We are confident that such a network will give an excellent added value and a clear political answer to the need to improve the fight against the illicit trafficking in firearms in the Western Balkan region.

THANK YOU