

Regional High Level Meeting

“Enhancing parliamentary awareness and action for more peaceful and sustainably developed societies - implementation of the Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and their ammunition in the Western Balkans (Roadmap)”

June 21-22, 2023

Tirana, Albania

Concept Note

Executive Summary

The state of the world, marked by violence and conflict, underlines the need to prioritise the prevention and reduction of armed violence. According to the Small Arms Survey, more than 1 billion Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are circulating worldwide, 85% in the hands of civilian¹, causing the death of approximately 211 000 people every year². The number of forcibly displaced people due to conflict, violence and persecution has reached over 89 million, the highest number since the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees records began.³ The situations behind forced displacement are highly linked to the misuse of SALW. Armed conflicts and violence, independent of their scale, are perpetuated by the uncontrolled availability of SALW, increasing the need for concise and effective steps to tackle its proliferation. The uncontrolled proliferation of SALW has widespread human, economic and social costs. Furthermore, it threatens democracy and good governance and facilitates violations of human rights and International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Civilians are the main victims of violations of IHL in armed conflicts.⁴ The serious human, social and economic effects in the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic further underscore the need to prevent armed violence as to build back better.

The Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons

The Theory of Change of the [Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons \(PFSALW\)](#) is to contribute to the achievement of more peaceful and sustainably developed societies by enhancing parliamentary action in the implementation and universalisation of international frameworks relevant to the prevention and reduction of SALW-related violence through three mutually reinforcing methodological pillars: capacity-building, policy-shaping and awareness-raising. The points of departure for these pillars are hence the three key roles of a parliamentarian; the legislative, oversight and awareness-raising functions.

¹ Small Arms Survey, 2020, Estimating Global Civilian-held firearms numbers, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/database/global-firearms-holdings>

² Small Arms Survey. 2022. Global Violent Deaths, <https://smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-GVD-July-2022-update.pdf>

³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2021, Figures at a glance, <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>

⁴ <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/contemporary-challenges-ihl>

PFSALW is the only membership-based organisation gathering parliamentarians globally across party-political lines, specifically related to the reduction and prevention of SALW-related violence. It is an organisation constituted by parliamentarians, for parliamentarians working for sustainable development, human security and peace-building. Constituted in the Spanish Congress in 2002, PFSALW today gathers 320 members across Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East.

Since its foundation in 2002, PFSALW has enjoyed a solid membership base and relations with parliamentarians from Western Balkans, for example by participation of parliamentarians from Western Balkans in PFSALW's regional and international activities. To build on previous initial efforts, PFSALW is dedicated to further expand its membership base in the region, aiming to strengthen the involvement of parliamentarians in the prevention and reduction of SALW-related violence.

The Regional Cooperation Council

The [Regional Cooperation Council \(RCC\)](#) is an all-inclusive, regionally owned and led cooperation framework. The framework engages RCC participants from South East Europe (SEE), members of the international community and donors on subjects which are important and of interest to the SEE, with a view to promoting and advancing the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the region.

Within the framework of the general political guidelines set by the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECF), the RCC works to develop and maintain a political climate of dialogue, reconciliation, tolerance and openness towards cooperation, with a view to enabling the implementation of regional programmes aimed at economic and social development to the benefit of the people in the region.

RCC is actively involved in enhancing the engagement of the legislative dimension in regional cooperation processes and in strengthening the parliamentary dialogue on various fields of regional cooperation and the European Union (EU) integration process. In this regard, RCC provides support to the regional parliamentary cooperation platforms South East European Cooperation Process Parliamentary Assembly (SEECF PA) and the Conference of the Parliamentary Committees on European Integration/Affairs of the States Participating in the Stabilisation and Association Process in South East Europe (COSAP).

The South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons

The [South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons \(SEESAC\)](#) functions under the mandate given to it by the [United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)](#) and the [Regional Cooperation Council \(RCC\)](#). Since 2022, in the area of SALW control, SEESAC is facilitating strategic and operational cooperation in SEE in line with the SEE Regional [Implementation Plan on Combatting the Proliferation and Impact of Small Arms and Light Weapons](#). Specifically, SEESAC's support on SALW control contributes to strengthened regional policy and operational cooperation, knowledge exchange and information sharing on SALW control; support to evidence based policies on arms control; comprehensive support and capacity building for countering illicit trafficking

and possession of firearms through training, Standard Operating Procedures and provision of equipment; support to further enhance the capacities for PSSM and destruction of surplus and confiscated weapons and ammunition. Since 2019, SEESAC is also responsible for coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the *Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons and their ammunition in the Western Balkans*, in line with the EU Council Decision 2018/1788.

Objective

The regional high level meeting seeks to increase parliamentary commitment, understanding and action on the impact and control of SALW as well as regional and international frameworks in this area including: the *Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)/firearms and their ammunition in the Western Balkans (Roadmap)*, which builds on the political commitment to the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UN PoA); and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 and SDG 5 of the 2030 Agenda, linking to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

The high level meeting will incorporate a gender equality perspective including to the extent possible the WPS agenda and strongly encourage the active participation of women parliamentarians, in line with UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and subsequent related resolutions.

Parliamentarians, especially women parliamentarians, are targeted as vital actors for armed violence prevention in view of their key roles, as to date, parliamentarians have a relatively low participation in international arms control processes. The goal is to enhance implementation by parliamentary action through capacity-building, policy-shaping and awareness-raising. The high level meeting seeks to strengthen women's role and participation in peace and security processes, including in decision-making on SALW, in line with the WPS agenda and the gender equality perspective in arms regulation policies, programmes and legislation, with a specific focus on the implementation of the Roadmap.

Results and lessons learned are expected to reach a wider international audience at relevant international fora e.g. Biennial Meetings of States /Review Conferences (RevCons) of the UN PoA or assemblies of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) – to share results as well as to underscore the importance of active participation and engagement of parliamentarians in peace and security, as stipulated in the conclusions of RevCon3⁵. The low level of parliamentary involvement in the above-mentioned mechanisms underlines the relevance of the efforts to improve parliamentary engagement, understanding and ownership of the international conventional arms control framework. Political will is crucial for the implementation of WPS, and to identify synergies with global arms regulation instruments.

⁵ United Nations. Final Report of the Third United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the UN PoA (2018): https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/CONF.192/2018/RC/3&referer=/english/&Lang=E

The high level meeting has a focus on the Western Balkans and will gather 24 key parliamentarians and 6 representatives of SALW commissions from all six jurisdictions in the Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

Background – armed violence in the Western Balkans and the Roadmap on a sustainable solution to arms control

In 2020, 531,000 persons died violently, including 88,400 women and girls, and millions more were affected by armed violence.⁶ Globally, firearms were used in about 40% of all violent deaths in 2020, which resulted in a total of 211,000 deaths.⁷ According to SEESAC's [Armed Violence Monitoring Platform](#), in 2021, in Southeast Europe, 1,341 victims of firearm incidents were reported, of whom 940 were men and 262 were women, as indicated by the available data. As a result of the misuse of firearms and/or explosives, 156 people died, 365 were injured, 519 were threatened. Forty-five persons died by suicide using a firearm/explosive, which is 34 % less than in 2020.

For a long-time, the Western Balkans have faced high level of violence, crime and human insecurity as a legacy of conflicts, political turbulence and economic crises. In the Western Balkans only during 2018, 349 persons died due to firearms related incidents, and 216 persons committed suicide in all six jurisdictions. Whereas in 2019, 403 persons died due to firearms related incidents, and 270 persons committed suicide in all six jurisdictions.⁸ Of the total of firearms related deaths reported in 2019, among the victims whose gender was reported 220 were men and 39 were women.⁹

It is vital to include a gender equality perspective in the work to prevent and reduce armed violence, due to the complexities of gender related violence. While men constitute the majority of perpetrators and victims, women and girls are also strongly affected by armed violence. 36.5 percent of women killed by a family member were killed with firearms, and 43.5 percent of all women killed by an intimate partner in SEE were killed with firearms.¹⁰ This shows us a clear picture of the gender dimension of SALW related violence in the region.

Apart from causing injury and loss of life, armed violence has severe effects on sustainable development, good governance and contributes to the persistence of armed conflict. Further, it facilitates violations of human rights, gender-based violence and impedes economic investment, having a negative impact on public health systems and productivity levels by draining public resources away from education and socio-economic development. Given the complexity of these issues, parliamentarians are crucial actors in the prevention and reduction of illicit SALW proliferation, through their legislative, oversight and awareness-raising functions.

* References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

⁶ Small Arms Survey. 2022. Global Violent Deaths, <https://smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-GVD-July-2022-update.pdf>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Data extracted from Roadmap Key Performance Indicators progress report 1 covering year 2018, progress report 2 covering January-June 2019, progress report 3 covering period July-December 2019.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ UNDP SEESAC. Bozanic, Dragan. The hidden pandemic: Firearms and intimate partner violence killing women. (June 2020): <https://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/blog/2020/hidden-pandemic-firearms-killing-women.html>

Under the auspices of the German Federal Foreign Office, European Union and the Regional Cooperation Council, UNDP's SEESAC organised on 1 February 2018 in Podgorica, a High-level Regional Meeting of the Deputy Ministers of Interior and Foreign Affairs. The meeting reiterated an explicit political commitment of all actors in the region towards reinforced small arms control and non-proliferation that was confirmed through the adoption of a Joint Statement. Moreover, recognising that the proliferation and illicit trafficking of firearms and their ammunition is a persistent threat for the internal security, the authorities in the region committed to develop a Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)/firearms and their ammunition in the Western Balkans (Roadmap). The purpose of the Roadmap is to serve as a guiding and consensual document developed and owned by the authorities of the region, in achieving a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of SALW/firearms, and its ammunition, in the Western Balkans. The document is a testimony of the consensus reached among all stakeholders in the region about the current challenges, the overall targets to be reached, and timeline of actions to be taken. It provides an overall platform for commonly agreed levels of performance, and outlines the commitment required at the strategic, policy and operational level amongst the beneficiaries, building on the political commitment to the UN PoA as well as legal obligation stemming from the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition (The Firearms Protocol).

Embedded in the Berlin Process, the implementation of the Roadmap facilitates further the efforts of the Western Balkans in meeting some of the key security conditions for full European Union Membership as set forth in the new EC Communication for "A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans", the annexed Action Plan in Support of the Transformation of the Western Balkans and the 2018 new EU strategy against illicit SALW and their ammunition "Securing arms, protecting citizens".

Implementation, results and impact

The regional high level meeting aims at providing parliamentarians, from the Western Balkans and members of the PFSALW, with policy information and knowledge (thematic expert sessions) that can allow them to engage at the jurisdiction's level to advance the Roadmap, the 2030 Agenda, WPS, and the UN PoA¹¹. In addition, the results of the high level meeting shall support parliamentarians to follow up with their governments, facilitate their participation as part of their government delegations in international meetings related to these instruments, and serve as a platform for parliamentary action at the domestic, regional and international policy level. Finally, the high level meeting also provides an excellent opportunity for all stakeholders; parliamentarians, civil society organisations, government representatives and diplomats to exchange views, discuss and carry on with a constructive dialogue concerning the implementation of the Roadmap, the 2030 Agenda, WPS, and the UN PoA.

¹¹ Consider the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition ([Firearms Protocol](#)), supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, given its legally binding nature.

By participating in this high level meeting, parliamentarians will benefit from the following:

- Improved expertise and policy knowledge on the arms control challenge in the Western Balkans, the Roadmap commitments, the 2030 Agenda, WPS and the UN PoA.
- Opportunity to take part of policy relevant exchanges with parliamentarians from the region and globally as well as with relevant experts and other stakeholders.
- Use of the political platform and spotlight that PFSALW, SEESAC and RCC provide in the Western Balkans in connection to the international policy levels, which will further advance and highlight the profile of parliamentarians and their efforts related to peace, security and SALW control initiatives.
- Possibility to be active part of PFSALW's membership base, gaining access to its parliamentary network, receive policy support and backing from the political leverage provided by the PFSALW.
- Depending on his/her actions, parliamentarians will benefit from strengthened political relevance and recognition, in the respective domestic contexts and as members of PFSALW, being considered knowledgeable and able to interact at the domestic, regional and international levels, liaise with different stakeholders, as well as to work towards armed violence prevention and reduction.
- Participating in the high level meeting requires the parliamentarians to commit to take action on the thematic issues in question in the domestic, regional or international context based on knowledge gained in the activity; as well as preparedness to participate in follow-up dialogue with PFSALW and partners after the high level meeting.

Expected profile of the parliamentarians from the targeted focus jurisdictions:

- Member of a committee relevant to the prevention of SALW-related violence and issues of security and disarmament, which include the implementation of the Roadmap, the 2030 Agenda, WPS and the UN PoA.
- Commitment towards armed violence prevention and reduction initiatives.
- Willingness/readiness to have an active role in relation to the topics of the high level meeting, e.g. contacting the government, speaking in the parliament, raising awareness.
- Readiness/willingness to liaise with PFSALW and partners to further discuss actions, follow up and evaluation steps, related to the common objective of contributing to armed violence prevention and reduction.
- Commitment to the gender equality perspective, which will be considered to the extent possible by PFSALW, SEESAC and RCC both in the selection process as well as the structure and thematic content of the high level meeting, in order to promote the advancement of the WPS agenda. Therefore, nomination of women participants is strongly encouraged.

In sum, parliamentarians will gain access to policy relevant tools and a specialised political platform, allowing them to take an active role in relation to the thematic topic of the high level meeting, both at the domestic, regional and international levels, and take advantage of the policy knowledge, the momentum and the support that PFSALW together with partners can provide prior, during and after the high level meeting. Therefore, it is expected that the participants commit to take action in their National Assemblies and at the regional and international levels, in form of speeches, media interventions, tabling questions to different authorities, as well as other means of parliamentary action.