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STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 1033rd MEETING OF THE OSCE FORUM FOR SECURITY CO-OPERATION

25 January 2023

On small arms and light weapons and stockpiles of conventional ammunition

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union and its Member States thank the speakers for their very interesting presentations on the important subject of co-operation in the field of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and stockpiles of conventional ammunition in South Eastern Europe and beyond.

The European Union condemns in the strongest terms the illegal, unprovoked and unjustified aggression by Russia against Ukraine, with the complicity of the Belarusian regime. Russia's actions in Ukraine continue to threaten peace and security in Europe and the world and are directly relevant to today's topic. The European Union stands firmly by Ukraine.

In that context, we must continue to combat the uncontrolled spread of SALW and their ammunition, which fuels other conflicts, fosters organized crime and encourages terrorism. It constitutes a major destabilizing factor for many countries. The safety and security of stockpiles of conventional ammunition is also an important issue, thereby preventing accidental explosions and the diversion of stockpiles of ammunition to make improvised explosive devices and protecting people in this way. Preventing and combating these illicit flows is a major development issue, as is made clear by Target 16.4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which calls for a reduction in arms trafficking by 2030.

In order to try to stem this scourge effectively and sustainably, the international community has joined forces within the framework of the United Nations, the OSCE and a number of other regional and subregional organizations. The European Union and its Member States contribute actively to this work. We fully support the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, including the means for strengthening the modalities and procedures for international co-operation and assistance, which was the focus of the Eighth Biennial Meeting held at the end of June 2022. We also welcome the work undertaken within the framework of the United Nations by the open-ended working group established pursuant to resolution 76/233.

Assistance to countries whose security is affected by arms trafficking and that do not have the appropriate control tools must be a priority. It is through increased co-operation among all stakeholders and improved co-ordination of existing instruments that we can effectively combat the trafficking and diversion of conventional arms and their ammunition. In addition, it is imperative to take into account the specific

features of the threat faced by different States and regions, which – although they are all concerned by trafficking in SALW – have different challenges to deal with.

The European Union has taken the measure of this challenge by giving particular priority to the fight against the trafficking of small arms and light weapons in the Western Balkans. France and Germany were the originators of a road map, now taken up by the European Union, aimed at strengthening and co-ordinating actions in this field. This initiative, launched at the end of December 2017, has been successful because it has managed to further mobilize countries and organizations in the region on this issue. It illustrates the role of regional co-operation in strengthening security. A total of 33 projects are in progress, representing 54 million euros.

This initiative was a response to the urgent need to step up the fight against SALW trafficking in the region. The multidisciplinary strategy required by the road map calls for the participation of all organizations and stakeholders that can contribute their expertise and experience in their fields of competence.

We welcome the significant contribution made by the OSCE, along with several international organizations and donors, in areas crucial to the effectiveness of States' policies (such as police dog capabilities, SALW deactivation, destruction of surpluses and stockpile management, public awareness-raising and support for weapons-collection activities). The OSCE has enjoyed great success with regard to SALW, but efforts need to be continued and intensified to take account of the new challenges arising from the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the situation in Central Asia.

The illicit circulation of SALW is a threat to the security of all of us, which is why we support the continuation of the assistance projects implemented by the Conflict Prevention Centre and by the field operations. In addition, we support the efforts and commitment of many OSCE participating States to develop, revise or adapt OSCE normative frameworks, practical guides and assistance mechanisms to current circumstances.

Small arms play a significant role in violence against women, including femicide. At the same time, women can effectively contribute to community awareness and education about the dangers associated with SALW. Therefore, and in line with Ministerial Council Decision No. 10/17, the integration of gender mainstreaming in the control of SALW is essential, also to ensure its effectiveness. The European Union therefore supports all efforts – the OSCE-UNODA Scholarship for Peace and Security, for example – to improve the inclusion and full, equal and meaningful participation of women in this field,

The fight against trafficking of small arms and light weapons requires a comprehensive vision that takes into account a wide range of issues. The European Union welcomes this discussion with great interest and remains fully committed to the issue.

Thank you.

The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia¹, Montenegro¹, Albania¹, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina¹ and Serbia¹, the potential candidate country Georgia, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, as well as San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

¹ The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.