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STATEMENT BY MS. IULIA ZHDANOVA, MEMBER OF THE DELEGATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO THE VIENNA NEGOTIATIONS ON MILITARY SECURITY AND ARMS CONTROL, AT THE 1033rd PLENARY MEETING OF THE OSCE FORUM FOR SECURITY CO-OPERATION

25 January 2023

Agenda item: Security Dialogue

Subject: The problem of small arms and light weapons and stockpiles of conventional ammunition in South-East Europe

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome the initiative of the Chairmanship of Bosnia and Herzegovina to organize a discussion on small arms and light weapons (SALW) and stockpiles of conventional ammunition (SCA) in South-East Europe. We are grateful to the speakers, who in their presentations addressed some aspects of the international efforts to combat illicit arms and ammunition trafficking in the region. We take the view that the root of the problem of SALW is the diversion of these arms to black and grey markets, which fuel terrorism and illegal armed groups and also lead to an increase in conflicts in the OSCE area of responsibility.

Control over SALW and their ammunition is a priority in the Russian Federation. Our country has strict regulations governing their circulation. We call for urgent action to curb the illicit flows of SALW and to find practicable solutions to this problem in the interests of international security. In that regard, we urge more effective implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in SALW in All Its Aspects, taking into account the efforts of the entire international community and under the co-ordinating role of the United Nations.

The Russian Federation devotes considerable attention to enhancing the effectiveness of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms as one of the key mechanisms for transparency and international security by tracing and identifying destabilizing accumulations of weapons in different regions of the world. At the same time, we are wary of attempts by a number of countries, for no good reason, to expand the scope of the Register, which could be used contrary to its basic aims and objectives, not least when defining the parameters of arms embargoes imposed through the United Nations Security Council.

As a regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, the OSCE has been involved for two decades in resolving the problem of illicit trafficking in SALW and SCA, including in South-East Europe. We believe it is important to further develop practical co-operation in this region, which

would contribute to building trust between the Balkan States, reduce the potential risks of exacerbating existing tensions and help to prevent smuggling.

We are convinced that the implementation of OSCE project activities in the Western Balkans should be of a clearly depoliticized nature, carried out within the framework of the existing mandate and subject to strict multilateral control, which would exclude possible misuse for the purpose of theft. At the same time, projects implemented under the auspices of the OSCE should not be used behind the scenes for the purpose of dragging certain participating States into external integrationist structures.

Mr. Chairperson,

It should not be forgotten that the problem of arms trafficking in the Balkans is a product of the armed conflicts on the territory of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990s accompanied by unprovoked, unjustified and illegal interventions by the North Atlantic Alliance. During the years of the Yugoslav bloodshed, the West supplied large quantities of weapons to the region. They were flown to States in the region, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, in violation of the arms embargo imposed by the United Nations Security Council. The consequences of this wilful policy of the United States of America and NATO, which claimed exceptionalism, are still echoing throughout the OSCE area.

According to an INTERPOL report published in 2021, the Western Balkans are still a major hub for illicit trafficking in SALW. Multinational criminal groups buy weapons for resale to European Union countries, including Belgium, France, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands. There is no need to look far for examples – most recently, radical extremists organized a series of horrendous terrorist attacks in the heart of Europe, involving the use of reactivated weapons. Once again, the entire European continent is paying the price for the aggressive pumping of weapons into the region by member States of the military bloc.

We note with regret that the United States and NATO are not abandoning their tried-and-tested ways of doing things. “Colour revolutions”, during which control of State-owned weapons arsenals is lost, are one of the main sources feeding illicit trafficking in SALW in the twenty-first century. We might recall Libya, Syria, some North African countries here, not to mention Ukraine, where some five million weapons have been in illicit circulation since 2019. And any efforts to solve this problem in that Eastern European country were met with wholesale corruption at all levels of government. The situation has not changed.

Since the start of the Russian Federation’s special military operation, Western countries have transferred hundreds of thousands of units of weaponry, military equipment and materiel worth tens of billions of US dollars to Ukraine. The Ukrainian armed forces have not only modern man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS) and SALW produced by NATO member States, but also costly artillery, multiple-launch rocket systems and other high-tech equipment. In parallel to the increase in military aid, the illegal market is also growing, with arms being sold to literally anyone, including criminal gangs from around the world. If the Russian Federation was already sounding the alarm on this issue at the beginning of last year, now Ukraine’s Western sponsors have also admitted that there is a problem.

On 31 October 2022, for example, *The Washington Post* reported that the United States had started on-site inspections in Ukraine because of the risk of weapons falling into the wrong hands. This primarily concerns Stinger MANPADS, which pose a serious threat to civil aviation, and Javelin anti-tank missile systems, which are said to be at increased risk of diversion. It is also worth noting that anonymous sources in the US State Department have admitted that only 10 per cent of the 22,000 weapons requiring special control have been inspected. Incidentally, the control reports to the Pentagon from Ukraine on military goods received were highly questionable – in effect handwritten receipts without invoices of any kind.

On 1 June 2022, INTERPOL Secretary General Jürgen Stock warned of the high probability of intensified illegal trafficking of arms originally destined for Ukraine. That is not all, though. While discussing the problem of arms smuggling from Ukraine last spring, Catherine de Bolle, head of Europol, warned that these weapons could possibly end up in Western countries. A couple of months later, Europol said it had specific information about the flow of ammunition and weapons from the zone of hostilities. It has incontrovertible evidence that criminal networks in the region are planning to smuggle heavy weapons, also using online platforms.

The criminal capabilities of the Ukrainian arms mafia have already been noted on the African continent. For example, on 30 November 2022, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari said that local authorities had found weapons meant for the Ukrainian armed forces in the hands of militants on Lake Chad. At the same time, representatives of the Ukrainian Internet site Weapons Ukraine announced that they were in a position to deliver a large shipment of small arms to Yemen.

It remains to be seen where and when the hardware for Ukraine sent by the “kindly” Western alliance of States will resurface next. For months, the Russian delegation has been presenting irrefutable photo and video evidence to Western participating States in the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) showing how the military equipment they supply is being sold for next to nothing by Ukrainian businessmen on the Dark Web. The whole world could be looking down the barrel of a “Western gun”. And yet, NATO and EU countries consistently ignore the threat of advanced precision weapons falling into the hands of radical nationalists, terrorists and extremists not only in Ukraine but also beyond its borders, which, given the elevated threats to international security, is equivalent to the West’s condoning of terrorist activities.

Mr. Chairperson,

In conclusion, a few words on the challenges for OSCE project activities in view of the current crisis in European security. It is important to understand that the diversion of Western arms and ammunition from Ukraine to the illegal market has the potential to undermine the efforts of the OSCE and international donors funding the projects. Ironically, many of the generous project backers are arms donors to the Kyiv regime at the same time. The double standards of the collective West extend even to the fight against arms trafficking.

Given these facts, it is not surprising that the once constructive interaction between delegations at the FSC on SALW and SCA is in deep crisis. The initiative to freeze co-operation comes from those participating States that commit the most gross and shameless violations of international principles and obligations, preventing the transfer of conventional arms and ammunition to zones of armed conflict in violation of international humanitarian law, as well as the basic principles of strict export control. The fundamental documents in question are:

- CSCE Principles Governing Conventional Arms Transfers (1993);
- OSCE Document on SALW (2000);
- Elements for Export Controls of MANPADS adopted under the Wassenaar Arrangement (2003);
- OSCE Principles for Export Controls of MANPADS (2008);
- United Nations General Assembly resolution 62/40 on the prevention of the illicit transfer and unauthorized access to and use of MANPADS (2007);
- EU Common Position (2008);

– Arms Trade Treaty (2013).

We strongly urge the EU-NATO wing of the OSCE participating States to reflect on the fact that the weapons they supply to Ukraine are being used to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity, as well as attacks on civilian objects and civilians, including women and children. The consequences of their policies are the expansion of black markets for arms and the descent of the OSCE area into lawlessness and rampant criminality. The Kyiv regime's arms sponsors have yet to realize this.

Thank you for your attention.