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**STATEMENT BY
THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 991st MEETING OF THE OSCE FORUM FOR
SECURITY CO-OPERATION**

27 October 2021

**On ongoing initiatives in the field of small arms and light weapons and stockpiles of
conventional ammunition**

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union and its Member States thank the speakers for their pertinent presentations on the ongoing initiatives in the field of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and conventional ammunition. The uncontrolled spread of SALW and their ammunition is a major security and development issue. It is contrary to peace, justice and the building of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. In line with target 16.4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the aim is to significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, while strengthening the recovery and return of stolen assets by 2030. This fight against all forms of organized crime must be intensified in order to promote the rule of law. The spread of these weapons continues to fuel many regional conflicts, foster organized crime and encourage terrorism. It also constitutes a major destabilizing factor. The protection and security of ammunition stockpiles is also essential to prevent accidental explosions and to protect people.

Mr. Chairperson,

The promotion of gender equality, raising awareness of these issues, the empowerment of women and the prevention of any act of gender-based violence are major priorities for the European Union. Small arms play an important role in violence against women, including femicide. The likelihood of a woman being killed by her partner increases significantly if there is a weapon in the home. On average, small arms are used in one third of all femicides worldwide, which goes to show the disproportionate impact of these weapons on women's safety.

The European Union and its Member States welcome in this context the progress made within the framework of the United Nations Programme of Action with regard to better integration of gender issues. On the occasion of the Third Review Conference on the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects in 2018 and the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action on Small Arms in 2021, the participating States undertook strong commitments in this area: they recognized that SALW affect women, men, girls and boys differently; agreed to increase women's participation in decision-making and implementation activities related to the Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument; and pledged to incorporate gender perspectives into SALW-related policies and programmes and into assistance programmes.

The European Union also supports the effective implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty, which aims to prevent and combat the diversion of conventional weapons, including SALW, to unauthorized end-users. The Arms Trade Treaty, to which all the Member States are party, is the first global legally binding instrument to recognize and create obligations that address the relationship between arms transfers and gender-based violence. Its effective implementation could help to combat and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, in line with SDG target 5.2.

Mr. Chairperson,

Assistance to countries the security of which is affected by arms trafficking and that do not have the appropriate control tools must be a priority. The EU Member States are actively engaged in this endeavour, also within the framework of the OSCE, with national or European funding. The European Union supports the OSCE with a view to improving the control of SALW and their ammunition in Ukraine, the Republic of North Macedonia, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, for example. Lastly, since the start of 2020, the European Union has been playing a greater role in steering and following up on the implementation of the regional Roadmap aimed at strengthening the co-ordination of efforts to combat illicit firearms trafficking in the Western Balkans by 2024. We welcome in this regard the significant contribution made by the OSCE in this framework, along with several international organizations and donors, in crucial areas such as police dog capabilities, SALW deactivation, destruction of surpluses and stockpile management, public awareness-raising and support for weapons-collection activities.

The EU Strategy Against Illicit Firearms, Small Arms and Light Weapons and Their Ammunition was adopted on 19 November 2018. It provides for the systematic incorporation of gender considerations into the design of new projects relating to the fight against gun violence and SALW control in general. It also sets out the necessary sharing of good practices and the exchange of information.

At the end of 2018, the Council of the European Union adopted a decision in support of gender mainstreamed policies, programmes and actions in the fight against small arms trafficking and misuse. This project aims to translate international gender-related commitments on small arms control into regional, national and local practices. Training programmes tailored to gender mainstreaming in small arms control have accordingly been implemented.

The European Union has always considered the fight against illicit trafficking in SALW a priority. Today, in the context we know, it is essential to continue combating illicit trafficking together. That is why we are grateful to you, Mr. Chairperson, for dedicating this Security Dialogue to initiatives on this issue that concerns us all.

Thank you.

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

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