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## First Workshop on Regional Approaches to Stockpile Reduction in Southeast Europe

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# First Workshop on Regional Approaches to Stockpile Reduction in Southeast Europe

Faced with the significant security and humanitarian impacts of stockpiled weapons and munitions, countries and organizations in Southeast Europe met in May to discuss strategies for stockpile reduction. The workshop, held in Croatia, focused on regional approaches to this problem, emphasizing information-sharing and coordination across borders.

by Daniele Ressler [ Center for International Stabilization and Recovery ]  
and F. David Diaz and Laurie Freeman [ PM/WRA ]

After a history of conflicts and the military build-up of weapons and ammunition in Southeast Europe, the region now faces security and humanitarian challenges from the presence of and need to reduce excess, unstable and loosely secured conventional weapons and munitions. Illustrating the dangers are explosions in recent years of ammunition stockpiles in Albania, Bulgaria and Serbia, which have resulted in considerable damage, in addition to killing scores of civilians and displacing hundreds. In an effort to begin addressing these issues, the first South East Europe Regional Approach to Stockpile Reduction workshop was held 5–7 May in Zagreb, Croatia.

This SEE RASR workshop was the first of a series of regional workshops developed to initiate discussions regarding national and regional plans for stockpile reduction and management. This regional approach is a concept born from the Adriatic Charter's September 2008 Chiefs of Defense Conference,<sup>1</sup> when officials recognized that a regional approach might improve efficiency and extend limited resources to address the dual threats of illicit proliferation and accidental explosion.

## Participants

The workshop had more than 50 participants, with senior-level Croatian General Staff and Ministry of Defense officials, as well as representatives from partner countries, international organizations and stockpile-threat policy experts. Representatives from the Ministries of Defense and General Staffs of Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia also attended the event. Kosovo and Macedonia were invited to the first RASR workshop but declined to attend, though they may participate in future meetings. Other guest organizations included:

- Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at James Madison University
- Explosive Ordnance Demilitarization Solutions
- International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance
- North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency
- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
- Regional Arms Control Verification and Implementation Assistance Centre
- Regional Centre for Security Cooperation
- Small Arms Survey
- South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons
- United Nations Development Programme



U.S. Ambassador Robert A. Bradtke delivers the opening remarks.  
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- Government representatives from the U.S. Departments of State and Defense
- Government representatives from Germany and Hungary

## Topics and Discussions

The first day of the Zagreb workshop focused on threats and responses in the region. The U.S. Ambassador to Croatia, Robert Bradtke, offered opening remarks noting that a coordinated regional approach to stockpile reduction is crucial and requires three things: addressing the threat proactively before a problem occurs, finding ways to become more efficient, and being committed to regional cooperation by approaching stockpile reduction as a threat affecting the whole region of neighbors. Pjer Simunovic, Croatian Ministry of Defense State Secretary, welcomed the workshop attendees, observing that stockpile reduction is significant for a variety of reasons, including security concerns related to international terrorism and national crime, as well as the humanitarian issue of explosions in communities.

The remainder of the first day consisted of speakers and panels addressing threats and responses to stockpiles. Small-arms and explosive-ordnance experts discussed the global and regional threats of excess weapons and unstable munitions. A panel of regional representatives examined recent explosions in the region—including

munitions depots in Chelopechene, Bulgaria, and Gërdec, Albania, in 2008—to understand what went wrong and how communities were affected. Another group of experts from the U.S. European Command, U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency and NATO reviewed best practices and guidelines for physical security stockpile management. The

directly engaged the participants themselves. As Acting Director of PM/WRA James Lawrence noted in his opening remarks, the goal of the RASR workshop concept is to unite practitioners dealing with small-arms stockpile and reduction issues in order to focus on real, practical issues and case studies, share information, and reduce excess

tion. These include the lack of understanding and support from national policy-makers, particularly in the legislatures, variations and conflicts in national laws, policies and regulations, and a lack of donor coordination leading to gaps and overlaps in bilateral and multilateral projects. Further complicating the pursuit of a regional approach are low levels of trust between governments, low levels of commitment among political leaders and requirements for the use of funding.

To address these challenges in the short term, participants agreed that conventional weapons destruction should be a recurring agenda item during regular high-level conferences of Defense Ministers and Chiefs of Defense in the region. They also suggested reinvigorating the South Eastern Europe Regional Implementation Plan, which was agreed to in 2001 and since then implemented by the Southeast Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons. Rather than reinventing the wheel, this restored focus would enable regional governments to build on existing policies in order to secure regional cooperation. In the long term, there need to be greater efforts are needed to educate lawmakers and policymakers about the threat of excess, unstable, and loosely secured conventional weapons and munitions. These awareness-raising efforts should be based on findings obtained from independent research on the scope of the problem. One aim could be to organize a regional summit on this issue at which donors are present to make pledges that will ensure a successful outcome.

**Infrastructure.** Infrastructure is another vehicle that can facilitate a regional approach. Participants recommended building and/or updating facilities, identifying facilities that can serve as regional destruction centers, improving maintenance of facilities and personnel systems, and conducting additional stockpile-reduction operations. The obstacles to such activities are largely monetary. Governments of the region lack funds for large infrastructure projects and are daunted by the sheer size of the challenge. Information regarding the size and content of stockpiles in each country is also lacking. Regional destruction centers face additional legal hurdles that prevent weapons and ammunition from being transported across national borders.

To advance infrastructure improvements, participants recommended undertaking a study to identify how, where and to what extent funds can be saved through collaborative efforts. They also suggested a study assessing national capabilities in the region and how they could be consolidated to be more cost-effective. Governments of the region could prioritize high-profile, “quick-win” projects,

Dave Diaz (left) and MAJ Sulev Suvari (right) lead the group in brainstorming ways to promote regional cooperation on stockpile reductions.

such as destruction events or stockpile security improvements to create momentum and political will for further stockpile-reduction efforts.

**Training, education and capacity building.** Training, education and capacity building are other important vehicles for fostering a regional approach to stockpile reduction. Not only will such efforts enhance domestic and regional technical expertise, promote greater understanding and support from policymakers and increase access to national and regional resources, but joint training will also help build trust among the militaries and defense ministries of the region. The main obstacles to regional capacity are the lack of knowledge and regional coordination.

Initially, all best-practice documents and guides should be translated into the languages of the region to increase accessibility. The establishment of a central repository for best practices, lessons learned, and related documents could provide a forum for information-sharing and collaboration. The development of shared training syllabi and facilities would not only cut costs, but also would be an important tool for sharing knowledge and building trust. The region could consider establishing physical security and stockpile management and conventional weapons destruction as a recurring part of the technical-level conferences held for experts in the region.

**Sharing of information and best practices.** Participants recognized the need for information exchange, transparency in technical and policy mechanisms, and enhanced regional coordination of practices where appropriate. In the short term, participants recommended a collabora-

tive study on national capabilities and procedures specific to South East Europe. To enhance cooperation, the region could establish informal working groups at various levels in the technical, management and policy arenas to share area-specific practices. In the long-term, establishing of an informal Group of Governmental Experts could be used to consolidate and coordinate these practices.

**Standardization.** The region recognized the need for shared munitions classifications standards, common munitions surveillance systems and national points of contact. Low levels of trust between governments and a lack of coordination are obstacles to this kind of information sharing. Navigating conflicting domestic laws and regulations will also prove to be difficult. The SEESAC maintains a database of national points of contact with responsibility over small-arms policies and programs. To improve coordination in the short term, governments should work with SEESAC to maintain an up-to-date database. In the medium term, it would be helpful to undertake a comprehensive study of what components of national stockpiles need to be classified to United Nations' standards. In the long term, the region could establish an informal Group of Governmental Experts to consolidate and coordinate these practices.

#### Outcomes

As the groups reassembled at the end of the workshop and reported on their discussion points, ideas and themes were presented, discussed and summarized by workshop facilitators. In conjunction with the five



The Croatia Secretary of State speaking during the conference.

day concluded with a panel of speakers from the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs' Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State, and the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency, which summarized existing efforts, guidelines and best practices related to the reduction and “right sizing” of stockpiles.

The theme for the second day was national and regional coordination in Southeast Europe. Representatives from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro offered details of their countries' national policies and plans for stockpile security and reduction. Speakers from three international organizations (NATO, OSCE and SEESAC) discussed how their organizations are assisting specific countries in Southeast Europe and supporting efforts to coordinate stockpile safety and reduction activities across borders.

Following these information-sharing sessions, the remainder of the workshop

threat. To support this goal, the workshop culminated with participants breaking into small working groups to talk face-to-face about realistic options and opportunities for regional cooperation related to Southeast European stockpile reduction and safety.

#### Priorities

Participants identified five priority issues where the RASR can facilitate greater coordination among actors involved in conventional-weapons reduction:

1. National and regional policy
2. Infrastructure
3. Training, education, and capacity building
4. Best practices and information sharing
5. Standardization

**National and regional policy.** Participants identified several issues related to national and regional policy and programs that have hindered a regional approach to stockpile reduc-

priority issues, five action items were identified in which the RASR can foster regional cooperation among organizations to reduce conventional weapons stockpiles in Southeast Europe.

**National and regional policy.** Suggestions included:

- Make conventional-weapons destruction a recurring agenda item during regular high-level conferences of Defense Ministers and Chiefs of Defense in the region, such as the Adriatic Charter
- Reinvigorate the South Eastern Europe Regional Implementation Plan
- Organize a regional summit on this issue

**Infrastructure.** The actions identified were:

- Build and/or update facilities
- Identify facilities that can serve as regional centers
- Improve maintenance of facilities and personnel systems
- Conduct additional stockpile-reduction operations, especially high-profile ones that will create political goodwill and momentum for further conventional weapons disposal and physical security and stockpile management.
- Conduct a study to identify how, where and to what extent funds can be saved through collaborative efforts
- Conduct a study on national capabilities and procedures specific to the region, considering how they could be consolidated to be more cost-effective

**Sharing of information and best practices.** Ideas highlighted were:

- Translate all the best practice documents and guides into the languages of the region
- Establish a central repository for best practices, lessons learned and related documents
- Establish an informal Group of Governmental Experts
- Work with SEESAC to maintain an up-to-date database of national points of contact

**Training, education, and capacity building.** Suggestions included:

- Develop shared training syllabi and facilities
- Include physical security and stockpile management and conventional weapons destruction issues at technical-level conferences
- Establish informal working groups in the technical, management and policy arenas

- Educate lawmakers and policymakers about the threat

**Standardization.** The group concluded that standardization was important, suggesting that it should conduct a comprehensive study on what components of national stockpiles must be classified to U.N. standards.

**Looking to the Future**

Regional workshops are one aspect of the RASR Initiative, which will develop various coordination mechanisms for governments in the region. The workshops will be held periodically to develop a dialogue among relevant government officials so they can share information, advice and lessons learned, as well as coordinate efforts when and where appropriate. Another RASR workshop is planned for fall 2009. ♦

For more information and announcements, visit <http://www.rasrinitiative.org>.

See Endnotes, Page 113



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