

SA/LW and the OSCE Response

The illegal dissemination of small arms/light weapons has recently come to the forefront of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's agenda. Through security forums and the provision of literature and physical assistance to affected countries, the OSCE is working to rid Europe of SA/LW that may potentially spread to more militant nations. Working with other international organizations such as the United Nations, the OSCE aims to encourage implementation of its *Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons*, drafted to address the spread of SA/LW and related issues, and to completely rid the area of dangerous arms.

by Jernej Cimperšek [Permanent Mission of Slovenia to the OSCE]

Why are small arms/light weapons an issue for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe¹ and in the OSCE area? The problem began when huge amounts of military hardware, such as tanks, combat planes, armed personnel vehicles, etc., were disarmed and dismantled in Europe during the 1990s; SA/LW and ammunition, however, were not significantly reduced or disabled. They were instead placed in huge depots in much of the former Soviet Union borderlands. Many of these depots are reportedly vulnerable to the elements and inadequately secured or guarded by security agencies with histories of corruption, including instances of suspicious arms sales. Some depots are not secured or watched at all. NATO and the Ukrainian Military estimate that Soviet soldiers left more than seven million rifles, pistols, mortars and machine guns in Ukraine, along with 2.5 million metric tons (2.76 US tons) of conventional ammunition. Wars in the former Yugoslavia also saw the collection of huge numbers of SA/LW and ammunition. Typically, a lot of this now-unnecessary military equipment finds its way to the illegal market.

Illicit trade of SA/LW from areas of the former Soviet Union and the Western Balkans poses a security threat for all states of the OSCE. SA/LW from these areas can be found in Africa, Afghanistan, Iraq and the South Caucasus. SA/LW are the weapons of choice in contemporary regional conflicts. There is a higher probability that a peacekeeper in Africa or in Afghanistan will be killed by illicitly traded SA/LW from the Western Balkans or the former Soviet Union than by any other weapon.² This situation is unacceptable to all countries participating in peace operations all over the world, and to the states of the OSCE³ in particular.

OSCE Reply

To address the threat posed to the international community by the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of uncontrolled SA/LW, the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation⁴ adopted the *Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons*⁵ in 2000. This document is a cornerstone of the OSCE response to the extreme growth and spread of SA/LW to the global community. It is also an important tool in combating threats caused by terrorism and organized crime, while underlin-



Stockpile of SA/LW in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.
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ing the importance of further strengthening its implementation. With this document, the OSCE sets norms, principles and measures, while simultaneously mandating participating states to keep the implementation of these norms, principles and measures under regular review. The need for the document was acknowledged by the OSCE *Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century*.⁴

In addition, while adopting the Document on SA/LW, the OSCE also saw an opportunity to provide a substantial contribution to the process underway in the United Nations.

In particular, it could implement the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in SA/LW, which would address illicit SA/LW activity during every stage of transfer, including production, trade and transportation.

Information Exchange

Under the OSCE Document on SA/LW, participating states agreed to share and submit updated national information on marking systems, procedures for the control of manufacturing, legislation and current practice in export policy. The document also addresses procedures and documentation, control over brokering, small-arms destruction techniques, stockpile security and management programs. In addition, the states pledged to exchanging annual data on national exports and imports of SA/LW from other OSCE-participating states. Last but not least, these states made a commitment to identifying surpluses and seizing and destroying excess small arms within their territories.

According to the data exchanged between 2001 and 2006, participating states destroyed 6,388,216 pieces of SA/LW, of which 5,213,134 were deemed surplus and 1,175,082 were seized from illegal possession and trafficking.⁶

OSCE Handbook of Best Practices

Standards set in the Document on SA/LW are high, and for some OSCE-participating states, implementation of the commitments represents a heavy burden. To assist them, the OSCE launched the *Handbook of Best Practices on Small Arms and Light Weapons* in 2003.⁷ In 2006, the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation adopted an annex to the handbook concerning national procedures for stockpile management and security of man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS). The handbook provides a set of recommendations for the implementing of the Document on SA/LW. It is a tool states can use to assist in applying the norms and standards indicated in the Document on SA/LW.

The *Best Practice Guide on National Procedures for Stockpiles Management and Security*⁸ deals with SA/LW only, following the categorization of the OSCE Document on SA/LW with regard to procedures, the guide outlines:

- National controls over the manufacture of SA/LW
- Marking, record-keeping and traceability of SA/LW
- National procedures of stockpile management and security
- Export control of SA/LW
- Definition and indicators of SA/LW surplus
- National procedures for the destruction of SA/LW
- SA/LW in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes
- National procedures for stockpile management and security of MANPADS

The handbook is available in all OSCE languages⁹ and in Arabic.

Practical Assistance on SA/LW

Since 2003, the OSCE has received 28 requests for assistance from 13 states for the enhancement of stockpile

management and security of SA/LW and stockpiles of conventional ammunition, and assistance with surplus destruction. The response to requests for assistance from the participating states in the field of destruction, stockpile management and security remains one of the most dynamic areas of implementation the Forum for Security Co-operation is involved with in this field.

In order to make the OSCE Document on SA/LW operational, an assistance mechanism was developed. This mechanism provides a wide range of support, including: small arms collection-and-control programs, as well as securing and managing stockpiles of small arms while reducing and disposing them.

Upgrading stockpile management and security is an important area of assistance. To date, the OSCE has received requests for this kind of assistance from the Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Montenegro and Tajikistan. Following the submission of these separate requests, the OSCE began training states on methods to improve the management and physical security of SA/LW stockpiles.



MANPADS in Tajikistan are prepared for destruction.

Assistance programs in Belarus and Tajikistan can be seen as good examples of OSCE activities during 2005. In that same year, the Kyrgyz Republic asked OSCE-participating states for assistance in the destruction of surplus SA/LW, and in enhancing stockpile management and security of storage sites containing SA/LW and conventional ammunition.

The OSCE and the government of Belarus agreed that the United Nations Development Programme would be the implementing agency for the project, which started in 2007 and will finish this year. The total budget for the project was about US\$600,000. The project focuses on four of 16 SA/LW storage sites in Belarus. The purpose of the project is to develop sustainable and effective security systems and infrastructures at the selected locations.

In 2005, the OSCE center in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, started to implement the Comprehensive Program on SA/LW and Conventional Ammunition in Tajikistan. It was conducted in two phases. The first phase of the program tackled problems

of surplus SA/LW, as well as safe and secure stockpile management of national holdings that remained in Dushanbe. In November 2006, the Dushanbe center started the second phase, which extended the scope of action from the capital throughout the country's other regions, including the Tajik-Afghan border. One of the main goals of this latter phase was to increase regional stability, SA/LW control, and anti-drug-trafficking capabilities of law-enforcement authorities throughout Tajikistan. This second phase primarily dealt with SA/LW physical stockpile security, and provided enhanced SA/LW and ammunition training for technicians and stockpile commanders. This last phase is scheduled for completion in 2009. Between 2005 and April 2009, participating states donated a total of almost 3 million euro (US\$4.2 million¹⁰) for SA/LW projects.

In 2008, the Forum for Security Co-operation decided to establish the *OSCE Directory of Points of Contacts on SA/LW and SCA* assistance projects. This publication is an additional tool for cooperation and coordination among participating states. The primary purpose of the POC directory is to facilitate information sharing between participating states on issues related to projects on SA/LW and stockpiles of conventional ammunition.

Information Exchange and Cooperation

The OSCE regularly organizes coordination meetings with all relevant actors working on SA/LW assistance projects. Coordination is seen as essential for success. The meetings' main purpose is to share experiences and best practices, and to avoid project duplication and "project shopping."¹¹

The OSCE developed a general framework for technical cooperation with the UNDP in line with the U.N. Programme of Action on SA/LW that encouraged regional organizations, such as the OSCE, to cooperate, and develop and strengthen partnerships in sharing resources for combating illicit SA/LW. The Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the two organizations in June 2006 and is aimed at providing a non-exclusive framework of technical cooperation for the implementation of SA/LW and conventional ammunition projects. Two joint projects were launched in the MOU framework in Belarus and Montenegro.

NATO, with its Partnership for Peace and Security through Science programs, within the framework of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, has gained significant experience and developed a record of projects in the SA/LW, landmine and conventional-ammunition remediation domains. Since the EAPC and OSCE areas are geographically similar, information exchange and mutual contacts between these two organizations are needed to avoid duplication of efforts, inadvertent redundancies and wasted resources.

The OSCE Secretariat conducts biannual staff talks with NATO and the European Union to exchange information and discuss a wide range of issues. The issuance of SA/LW and conventional ammunition projects has become an important part of their agenda.

Conclusion

The OSCE Document on SA/LW remains an effective and useful tool in addressing the problems arising from SA/LW. It also fosters transparency, as well as confidence, among the participating states. The document continues to serve as an important framework for dealing with surpluses and stockpiles of SA/LW, with a view toward reducing the risk of destabilizing accumulations and their uncontrolled proliferation.

Addressing requests for assistance from the participating states in the fields of destruction, stockpile management and security, continues to be one of the most dynamic areas for the OSCE. The practice of regular reporting to the Forum for Security Co-operation on the status of implementation of relevant projects has proven an important tool for effective and efficient management of OSCE projects. With this venue, the OSCE created one of the first international forums recognizing the need for regulations governing the activities of international arms brokers and encouraging participating states to take action. The OSCE was also the first organization to touch upon the issue of illicit SA/LW trafficking by air.

In dealing with SA/LW surpluses and stockpiles, the OSCE is the leading regional organization for transparent implementation of national legislation, rules and procedures. The destruction of SA/LW is a key solution to reducing the risks of illicit trafficking. According to Section IV of the OSCE Document on SA/LW, "The participating states in the OSCE agree that the preferred method for the disposal of SA/LW is destruction."⁵ Destruction is expensive, which is why countries sometimes donate surplus SA/LW to areas where the international community trains and equips new military and police forces.

This practice is not the best solution. Frequently, newly established and still-recovering institutions responsible for arms-trade control in recipient countries are unable to prevent weapons from moving into illegal markets. Illegally trafficked weapons from poorly secured storage facilities also find their way into the country. That, together with the threat it poses to our troops in these operations, confirms that the international community should assist in the destruction of excess weapons in countries with large stockpiles of SA/LW. ♦

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