



Tomás Reyes Ortega from the European Council discusses EU strategy to combat SALW with Forum staff.



UNDP's Leonora Visoka captures the attention of Albanian MPs (l-r) Gezim Musabelliu, Stefan Cipa and Artur Hasanbelliu.



Croatian MP Sime Lucin interviewed by the Serbian media.



Montenegrin MPs Velizar Kaludjerovic and Novak Radulovic during a break in the events.



## Western Balkans Parliamentary Forum on SALW launched in Belgrade

Parliamentarians from across the Western Balkans convened May 22-23 to launch the regional chapter of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Belgrade, Serbia. Representatives from the EU, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the global Parliamentary Forum Secretariat spoke at the event, highlighting the need for increased national and regional parliamentary engagement to combat the proliferation of SALW.

“At present most of the Western Balkans Forum activities are focused on building awareness on SALW issues amongst parliamentarians in the region. It is our aim to build a strong partnership with parliamentarians that are personally dedicated to the cause of tightening control over SALW in their communities and to be able to provide them with the tools they need in order to create and pass new laws, improve implementation and create an open dialogue in the society,” said Ana Martinovic Regional Coordinator for the Western Balkans Forum.

MP's from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro attended the event. Serbian parliamentarians were unable to attend due to last-minute elections for President of Parliament.

Several objectives for the Western Balkans Forum arose during MP discussions. Among them was the need for legislative ratification in line with EU standards, stronger transparency, parliamentary exchange, enhancing parliamentary knowledge and engagement in global policy making.

“It's very good to meet the people of the region, we have many differences in mentality and politics, but...if I meet people from the other five countries, I would never raise my voice to them because I met them and I know them personally. This is more important than anything,” said MP Artur Hasanbelliu from Albania.

“Being able to provide targeted assistance at this point is the biggest challenge. We are currently trying to establish strong partnerships with the parliamentarians in the region. We are counting on them to use the Forum and for them to guide the work of the Forum by providing comments and asking for assistance,” Ms. Martinovic said.

From the global Parliamentary Forum Secretariat, legal adviser Efraim Gómez spoke on the important role parliamentarians play in creating legislation, providing executive oversight and promoting public awareness on SALW control. Mr. Gómez also highlighted various legislative issues to take into account.

“Working with legislation is not only about making parliamentarians implement international instruments: parliamentary work on small arms legislation is about tailoring regulations for the public, to make it responsive to human security needs. That in turn means that small arms legislations have to be comprehensive, policy-oriented and principled - they need to be anchored not only in traditional concepts of small arms control, but should also include substantial mainstreaming of, for example, gender, education and the child rights perspective,” Mr. Gómez said.

European Council Office of the Personal Representative on non-proliferation, Tomás Reyes Ortega showed positive signs that funding is widely accessible for anti-SALW projects in the Balkan region. “The EU wants to be more than an organization based on aid or trade...we are developing a common security strategy which incorporates prevention, effective multilateralism and international cooperation,” he said.

The 16 MP’s discussed a draft Inaugural Declaration of the Western Balkans Parliamentary Forum and decided to wait to sign it until the parliaments of the respective countries had an opportunity to review it.

The event was organized by the UNDP’s Southeastern European Small Arms Clearinghouse (SEESAC) and the global Parliamentary Forum on SALW.



MPs from FYR Macedonia Roza Topuzovska Karevska and Oliver Spasovski discuss the political aims of the Western Balkans Forum with UNDP’s Alain Lapon.



Montenegrin MP Velizar Kaludjerovic fills in the application to become a member of the Western Balkans Parliamentary Forum.



MPs from Bosnia Herzegovina listen as UNDP’s Amna Berbic makes a point (l-r) Dragica Hinic, Zeljko Grubestic, Adem Husic and Branko Zrno.