

Outcome of May 2009 South East Europe RASR Workshop

On May 6-7, 2009, the United States government hosted a workshop in Zagreb, Croatia to launch the South East Europe Regional Approach to Stockpile Reduction (RASR).

The workshop was attended by representatives from the Ministries of Defense and General Staffs of Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia; U.S. government officials from the Departments of State and Defense; and representatives of NATO, NAMSA, OSCE, UNDP. Also attending were representatives from EOD Solutions, the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance, the Mine Action Information Center, the Regional Center for Security Cooperation, Small Arms Survey, and the Southeast Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC). Kosovo and Macedonia were also invited to the first RASR workshop, but declined to attend, though they may participate in future meetings.

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

- 1) national and regional policy;
- 2) infrastructure;
- 3) training, education, and capacity building;
- 4) sharing of information and best practices; and
- 5) standardization.

These issues will serve as the basis for subsequent RASR meetings. Participants were unanimous in their desire to see a subsequent RASR workshop in the fall.

1) National and Regional Policy

Participants identified several issues related to national and regional policy and programs that have hindered a regional approach to stockpile reductions. 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 amongst political leaders, and short time horizons.

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 - agreed to in 2001 and since then implemented by Southeast Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) - that aims to reduce the flow and availability of small arms and light weapons in South East Europe. Rather than reinventing the wheel, this would enable the governments of the region to build on existing policies in order to secure regional cooperation. In the long-term, there need to be greater efforts to educate law-makers and policy-makers about the threat of excess, unstable, and loosely secured conventional weapons and munitions. These awareness-

raising efforts should be based on data and findings obtained from independent research on the scope of the problem. One of their aims could be to organize a regional summit on this issue at which donors are present to make pledges that will ensure a successful outcome.

2) Infrastructure

Infrastructure is another vehicle by which to 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. There is also a lack of full information on the size and content of stockpiles in each country in the region. Regional destruction centers face additional legal hurdles that prevent weapons and ammunition from being transported across national borders.

In order 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. (For example, such an assessment already exists for Bosnia.) Governments of the region could prioritize high-profile, "quick-win" projects -- such as destruction events or stockpile security improvements -- to create momentum and political will for further stockpile reduction efforts.

3) 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 policy-makers, and increase access to national and regional resources, but joint training will 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 in order to increase access to the information. 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 be an important tool for sharing knowledge and building trust. The region could also 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.

4) 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 collaborative 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, the establishment of an informal Group of Governmental Experts could be used to consolidate and coordinate these practices.

5) 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 Southeast Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (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 on 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.

Action Items

National and Regional Policy

- 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

- 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 will and momentum for further CWD and PSSM
- 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, with a view to how they could be consolidated to be more cost-effective.

Sharing of Information and Best Practices

- 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

- Develop shared training syllabi and facilities
- Include PSSM and CWD at technical-level conferences
- Establish informal working groups in the technical, management, and policy arenas
- Educate law-makers and policy-makers about the threat

Standardization

- Conduct a comprehensive study on what components of national stockpiles must be classified to UN standards