Mr. Chairman,

In the Netherlands we have created a cooperation framework for all matters pertaining to firearms, called the National Firearms Platform. Organizations participating in the platform are the Police, the Customs, the Royal Marechaussee, the National Forensic Institute and the Ministry of Security and Justice. Staff members from the organizations involved form the Steering Group of the Platform; the firearms experts from these organizations form the Expert Group.

The activities of the National Firearms Platform are based on a formal long term programme. This long term programme describes the strategy. Objectives of the Platform are a structural improvement in the fight against firearms crime, an increase in expertise among law enforcement officers and cooperation with internal, external and international partners in the field.

Based on the idea and success of the National Firearms Platform in the Netherlands, a European Firearms Experts working group (EFE) was established during the EU Presidency of the Netherlands in 2004. To avoid bureaucracy the EFE was conceived as an informal network. A more formal status was not excluded, but left for a later stage. Creation of the EFE was agreed by the European Chiefs of Police Task Force. The EFE was tasked with *inter alia* the following:

- to stimulate multi agency cooperation,
- cooperation with Europol,
- to initiate and perform joint operational actions throughout the EU,
- to develop strategic plans, and
- make an EU threat assessment on firearms.

To structure the EFE work, the strategy is divided into three components: intelligence (that is to manage the collection and coordination of information); enforcement (conduct operational activities) and prevention. The EFE group has a work plan, which sets out its prioritised actions and which forms part of the overall coherent strategy, in which the priorities are agreed and understood by all EFE members.

The EFE produced a threat assessment in 2007 and has kept it updated since. The assessment is intended to analyze the threat to the Member States of the European Union posed by the criminal use and supply of firearms. It informs law-enforcement agencies within and pertaining to EU Member States of the nature and scale of the current threat resulting from firearm-enabled crime, and from those who supply or own firearms. It will also seek to identify intelligence gaps, along with recommendations for future tasking.
In December 2010 the Council of the European Union adopted the “European Action Plan to combat illegal trafficking in so called “heavy” firearms which could be used or are used in criminal activities”. In drawing up the Action Plan, the work and expertise of the European Firearms Experts group was taken into account. It was agreed in the EU Action Plan that actions should be taken in improving the existing crime image, strengthening the cooperation between the Member States’ law enforcement agencies and EU agencies and strengthening police or administrative control on the different potential sources of illegal firearms trafficking.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to take this opportunity to share with colleagues an example of regional cooperation in which our National Platform Firearms was involved. In 2007 and 2008 the Netherlands and Croatia cooperated in the framework of the so called “EU CARDS” activities, working together in combating trafficking in firearms, ammunition and explosives. The overall objective of this project was to contribute to a more efficient prevention and suppression of organized crime and terrorism in Croatia. This was done by enhancing the institutional capacity of the Forensic Science Centre and the overall ability of the Ministry of the Interior to tackle the problems of illegal manufacturing and trafficking in firearms, ammunition and explosives in line with the EU standards. The implementing partners to the Ministry of the Interior (the Criminal Police Directorate and the Forensic Science Centre) were the Netherlands Forensic Institute and the Dutch Police.

This integrated project resulted, inter alia, in an inventory of needs and gaps, a threat assessment, recommendations on legislation, a new methodology on policing, and a “train the trainer” programme.

To conclude, I would like to stress here that this project was beneficial to the Dutch police as well, in that it provided a mirror of the way we operate. Sharing our knowledge and experience was a learning process for all involved.

Thank you