



**European Union**

**EU Statement  
Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)  
Group of Governmental Experts  
Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons  
Geneva, 9-13 April 2018**

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Montenegro\*, Serbia\* and Albania\* and the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina align themselves with this statement.

Allow me to start by thanking you for your skilful chairmanship of the Group of Governmental Experts on LAWS and express our continued support for its important work. We welcome the extension of the GGE's mandate and consider that the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) remains the relevant international forum in this regard, combining diplomatic, legal and military expertise and involving industry and civil society. We urge all parties to comply with their financial obligations in full and on time so that the next GGE meeting can take place in August, as scheduled.

Building on the conclusions and recommendations agreed at the first GGE meeting in November 2017, we encourage all parties to seek common ground and strive for further progress. As an overarching element in the context of LAWS, we will continue to emphasise the application of, and compliance with international law, in particular International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Human Rights Law.

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\*Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

As regards the first issue on the agenda, the EU considers that a preliminary working definition on LAWS would be useful to make progress in our debate. While fully autonomous lethal weapons systems do not exist yet, a common understanding of concepts and characteristics relating to LAWS would facilitate our discussions on other points on the agenda. We do not consider non-autonomous systems such as automated, remotely operated, and teleoperated systems to be LAWS.

Secondly, human involvement and the human-machine interaction in the lethal decision-making process merit further elaboration. Discussions on human oversight, human judgement or human control should be further substantiated. We firmly believe that humans should make the decisions with regard to the use of lethal force, exert sufficient control over lethal weapons systems they use, and remain accountable for decisions over life and death.

The first GGE meeting in November confirmed that international law, including IHL and Human Rights Law, fully applies to all weapons systems, including LAWS and that States remain responsible and accountable for their development and use in armed conflict. Compliance with IHL is a key requirement that States need to fulfil in any case and without prejudice to any possible outcome of the GGE on LAWS. Appropriate human control is essential to ensure compliance with relevant IHL principles, including the protection of civilian population through distinction, proportionality and precaution in attack and the protection of sick, wounded, prisoners of war and those who are considered *hors de combat*.

In this regard, legal weapons reviews, as required by Article 36 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions are crucial. These require that States conduct legal reviews to establish, in each specific case, whether a weapon, means or method of warfare can be developed, acquired or used lawfully. Such reviews should also assess the legality of emerging weapons systems, including LAWS. We encourage all States to conduct such weapons reviews and we also encourage more regular and systematic exchange of information and sharing of national experiences on legal weapons reviews that would contribute to transparency and confidence building between States and development of best practices.

Thirdly, we are looking forward to the panel discussion on potential military applications of emerging technologies and hearing from experts about possible benefits as well as possible risks related to the development, proliferation and use of LAWS. We might also devote attention to other aspects related to remote interference of future LAWS, such as cyber safety and security, which could theoretically alter their set-up and undermine the degree of sufficient human control applied to them.

Given the intrinsic dual-use nature of emerging technologies, we should avoid hampering progress in civilian research and development, especially innovation in high-technology industries. It is possible to combine scientific freedom with scientific responsibility. Further awareness raising activities could be considered to promote the principle of responsible

innovation and ensure that all stakeholders - scientists, industry, military and political decision-makers - stay within the normative framework which the international community has so far established.

This brings me to the fourth and final point on the agenda. According to its mandate, the GGE should "explore and agree on possible recommendations on options related to emerging technologies in the area of LAWS in the context of the objectives and purposes of the CCW". Multilateral diplomacy should not be outpaced by technological developments. While fully autonomous lethal weapons systems do not exist yet, the GGE can address challenges related to LAWS and discuss possible options for regulation of the use of emerging technologies in those weapons systems that might not fulfil the criteria set up by IHL and other provisions of international law, including on the protection of the environment. Without prejudice to its outcome, the work in the GGE could pave the way for identifying possible ways forward. EU Member States have tabled proposals in this regard. We are looking forward to further elaborating on appropriate policy options.

I would like to conclude by underlining that gender equality and empowerment of women is an important horizontal priority for the EU. The EU believes it is important to take into account gender perspectives when discussing the issue of LAWS. Gender has a potential impact on emerging technologies, for example gender biases in algorithms, and hence this should be taken into account when developing policies. But even more importantly, as for all disarmament discussions, our deliberations would benefit from gender diversity in participation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman