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## **Ladies and Gentlemen**

Today all the SEE countries share an aspiration to contribute to the new European security architecture and have a common vision of the need to promote the democratic values. There is no split among our countries.

The main idea in this presentation is that better regional cooperation in South East Europe is presently a measurable achievement supported by clear facts and figures, but still it is a huge challenge for fighting trans-border organized crime. Another idea is that the present and future of combating organized crime is shaped by the capability of our law enforcement agencies to cooperate regionally on the principle of information sharing, analysis and intelligence led operations. More specific, a regional organization such as the SECI Center is delivering valuable support to the national law enforcement agencies through information sharing, knowledge development, joint planning and common action against trans-border organized crime.

Over the past 15 years, enormous opportunities for trans-border organized crime have appeared in the SEE and some of the obvious dangers have already affected the regional security: illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings, drugs, proliferation of small arms and smuggling of highly taxable goods such as cigarettes and stolen vehicles.

For example, during 2005 more than 300,000 illegal migrants were detected at the borders of the South East European countries and more than 60 tons of drugs were seized region-wide, out of which 10 tons were heroin from Afghanistan.

More recently various forms of extremism are quietly fermenting within SEE borders and the participation of most of the regional states to the global war against international terrorism has raised the spectrum of pending terrorist attacks in these countries. SEE is also the home region of criminal groups dealing with financial and computer frauds. During past years, complex internet frauds, money laundering and money counterfeiting cases have been related with criminal gangs from the region.

Illegal immigration from the South-East European non-EU countries and beyond, will increase to target the EU neighbor countries. Drug trafficking, human trafficking and smuggling of high duty goods from the Middle East, Caucasus area and the CIS will increase and target more and more the SEE countries and mainly Greece, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary and Romania as front line countries. Financial frauds and computer crimes will also increase alongside with the economical development.

Many governments, international initiatives and organizations have recognized organized crime and corruption as one of the biggest security threats facing the SEE countries and have declared this as priority of their work. The EU, Council of Europe, OSCE, Stability Pact, have been the initiators and supporters of programs aiming to the law enforcement and judiciary reforms in the region, and mainly for strengthening police capacities against serious crime.

Improvement of the national legal frameworks and restructuring the law enforcement systems are primary challenges for fighting trans-border crime in South East Europe. Also the international cooperation is a huge challenge, as there are many cooperation frameworks but a unite view about how to streamline regional cooperation efforts still needs to be implemented.

Almost all of the countries in the SEE region share recent experience of transition to democracy, and to some extent some are still finding their feet as single players in the international law enforcement arena. They naturally find it comforting to share developments and cooperation activities first with neighbors and others from a similar background, even if their long term chances of Euro Atlantic integration diverge or they find themselves in disagreement in certain areas.

The most viable and cost-effective solution, endorsed by practice, is a flexible law enforcement organization (currently the SECI Center) that pools regional information sharing and operational coordination through unitary cooperation policy and procedures. Membership of such an organization gives the member countries a sense of ownership and responsibility for the regional cooperation process and allows for the coordination among multiple law enforcement actors.

The SECI Center in Bucharest became operational in 2001 and is an excellent example of how we are challenging and addressing the evolution of South East European organized crime in its trans-border dimension through the cooperation of 12 member countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Moldova, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia and Turkey\*. Countries have equal position. This has developed their sense of responsibility about law enforcement cooperation. A short six years later, not only is cooperation flourishing, it has exceeded all expectations, to a point where its original charter and agreement must be amended to keep pace with the Center's progress. All this period, the Center has played a major role in developing law-enforcement cooperation, and has contributed to the overall regional security and stabilization of its member countries.

\*In the nearest future Georgia and Montenegro are going to be receive full membership.

Behind the member countries, there are 16 other countries that have gradually been granted the status of observer to the SECI Center. It is for the first time when altogether 28 states are cooperating on police and customs issues focused on SEE in the framework of a permanent information sharing and operations. Italy and the USA have a permanent presence at the Center through the representatives of the Italian Police, Guardia di Finanza, the US Department of Justice, FBI, DEA, and the US Secret Service.

The SECI Center has positively influenced the regional law enforcement from the very beginning and together with its partners such as Interpol, WCO and Europol, has made things move ahead firstly in basic and then in more advanced police and customs cooperation issues.

The flexibility of the SECI Agreement has brought outstanding privileges to the work of the Center. The operational design and methods, based on information exchange through the liaison officers and the Task Forces, was supported by all our member countries and valuable initiatives were implemented. The operational activities increased, from around 300 cases supported through the SECI channel during 2001 to more than 2000 during 2005.

In only four years, 23 region-wide operations were implemented under the SECI Center coordination. Never before had anything similar been tried, and when starting these operations, it was not at all clear if such coordination could be possible. Operations proved to be successful, and countries gained experience in such a matter. As expressed, many times by our customs and police agencies, participation in our regional operations was an opportunity for them to cooperate internationally, as well as to strengthen their relations with other domestic partners, by sharing the same operational goals in the SECI framework.

The SECI Center has also the capacity to bring the countries together and organize specific investigations targeting criminal groups. Joint teams are established in the region and coordinated investigations are developed with the financial and logistical support of the SECI Center. A significant trend over the past six months is a more active posture and the development of more joint investigations among the Western Balkans countries in the framework of the SECI Center in the area of illegal immigration.

More than 200,000 illegal migrants were detected at the borders and on the territories of the South East European countries during the year 2005.

Our general approach of the organized crime issue in the region is that the SECI Center is an expert service provider for our countries. We think regionally and develop strategic knowledge about the common threat and then we act sequentially. Based on our member countries' needs, we offer a cooperation environment where information is shared, analyzed and common action is implemented. To achieve this goal, we employ as basic working methods strategic analysis, regional operations, coordinated investigations, and trainings. The Center is

delivering strategic analysis products in the areas of drugs, cigarette smuggling, and illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings. These situation reports are released every six months, to support the activities of our Task Forces. By this, we are supporting the national decision makers with recently developed information about the trends in the whole region.

During the last three years the Center has implemented a special witness program for supporting the regional judicial process. This is an assistance program for victims of human trafficking, citizens of member countries to participate as witnesses in court proceedings in another member country. This is implemented in close cooperation with the law enforcement and judicial authorities of the members.

Today the SECI Center is working at full operational potential to integrate the cooperation among SECI member countries. There is a huge need for cooperation, thus for a modern and still flexible legal base (the new SELEC Convention) and a sound budget.

Development of an effective analytical framework and technical control procedures within SEE will deliver an insight into the existing and emerging threats related to the import /export or transshipment that are legitimately run all across the region. Due to the manageable number of member countries, the intelligence collection, analysis and sharing in the framework of the SECI Center will be critical in reducing the decision time between recognizing a security risk in SEE, designing policy choices and executing the regional desired course of law enforcement action.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honor to have the opportunity to present to you some issues concerning the regional cooperation against organized crime in South East Europe. Hope this helps to confirm that there is real substance behind the rhetoric. It is my strong belief that the SECI Center makes a valuable contribution to the efforts of all SEE nations to combat trans-border crime by offering a specialized framework for police and customs cooperation. We are also extending our preparedness. Where we are today is not the end point. We are developing our capacity to respond to new challenges, but always guided by the interests of our countries.

This is not a job which any of us, in South East European governments, national police forces, in intelligence and security services or in international organizations can do alone. Much of what we have achieved has only been possible through joint working and the constructive dialogue we have established. **To conclude, the fact is that we are now far better cooperative in law enforcement matters in South East Europe and specifically Western Balkans than we were in the past**, and this make us look optimistically to the future. Regional law enforcement along with organizations such as the SECI Center will continue to work together to undermine and reduce the impact of trans-border organized crime. But we must also rely on the recognition, understanding and involvement of the EU if we are to have success in this battle.

Thank you very much.