

**SECI Day Speech
By JCC Chairman, Mr. G. Kounadis**

Your Excellencies, Honored Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

As the Chairperson of the Joint Cooperation Committee, which is the governing board of the SECI Center, allow me on behalf of the JCC to extend my warmest welcome to all of you on the occasion of SECI Day 2005.

In the course of the years which have passed since the establishment of SECI, a great deal has been achieved in the area of combating organised crime. In this context, the Regional Center, as a cooperative law enforcement agency, is considered a valuable tool for the abatement of illegal practices in our region.

Despite the uncertainties pertaining in the period when the SECI agreement was signed, in 1999, our countries exhibited the political will to come together and cooperate in such a sensitive field. This initiative is being considered successful by both, our governments and the other actors in the international scene as well.

Those involved in the organised crime have, in the meantime, received a decisive message of direct confrontation with the law enforcement bodies. The SECI Regional Center is ranking high in this respect. Indeed at SECI, twelve countries cooperate daily in combating organised crime, which we must recognise as one of the greatest challenges to security and prosperity worldwide, today.

We note with satisfaction that our region is steadily moving towards various international bodies and institutions pursuing closer cooperation patterns among the members of the international community. Most notably, the approximation between all countries in our region with the European Union, although at different degrees for each of them, acquires particular importance. We need such strategic partners to support our goals. Stabilisation of contacts and strengthening of relations with the most significant international bodies would greatly benefit our work. Without ignoring the decisive contribution of donators and of observer Countries, the progress achieved so far has clearly delineated our image and created expectations for the future.

We are faced with several security challenges, just to mention, trafficking of human beings, drugs, small arms and light weapons proliferation, stolen vehicles, financial and commercial crime, last but not least terrorist networks.

SECI stands on the threshold between South - Eastern Europe and its neighbours further to the Black Sea region, another region with which closer cooperation is required in fields similar to those just mentioned. This perspective may present a major challenge for SECI. It is believed that, by expanding cooperation to such neighbouring states, we would participate more effectively in the collective effort to combat organised crime, while securing a safe environment for commerce and trade.

The new strategic vision of SECI over the next five years, has to be developed, according to European and other international standards and best practices, as an effective tool for the law enforcement agencies in Southeast Europe, in fighting organised crime.

We are convinced that if SECI continues its fight against organised crime it will offer a major contribution in building a safer world for future generations.

Thank you again for sharing this special day with us here at SECI and for your support as we continue the fight against organised crime in our region.