

Yalçın ÇAKICI
Director of SECI CENTER

***Honourable Chairman,
Excellencies,
Esteemed colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,***

On behalf of the SECI Regional Center for Combating Trans-border Crime, I would like to welcome you to the 3rd Annual Meeting of the SECI Center Member States Chiefs of Police and General Directors of Customs Administrations.

It is a pleasure to have among us, along with representatives of all the Member Countries, our international partners, such as Interpol, Europol and IOM and several Observer Countries. The large number of participants emphasizes once more the SECI Center's commitment for a successful cooperation at the regional level, in the fight against organized transborder crime.

Throughout the years, the goal of the regional law enforcement efforts was to achieve a unified response from the countries with regard to fighting and eradicating organized criminal groups which operate within or beyond the Southeast European region. In the investigation and prosecution of transborder crime, and especially in the case of organized criminal activities, it was imperative to develop a common policy for the purpose of information exchange among the countries and to have a good and successful example of regional law enforcement cooperation in various fields of interest.

The SECI Center was designed to give such an opportunity for communication, coordination and cooperation between the law enforcement authorities of its 12 Member Countries in the Southeast European (SEE) region, in order to give more strength and dynamism to the fight against organized transborder crime.

We are gathered here today, as Member Countries, to celebrate the "SECI DAY," the fifth anniversary of 26 May, 1999, namely the signing of the SECI Agreement on Cooperation to Prevent and Combat Transborder Crime, which is a historical event for the Region in combating trans-border organized crime. On behalf of all SECI Center members, I would also like to express my gratitude to the Romanian authorities, our hosts, for their continuous support to the Center and to the regional law enforcement activities.

2003 was a year of intense operational activity for the SECI Regional Center, and also a year during which we continued to strengthen the cooperation with our international partners. Last year we organized 6 regional operations in the framework of the SECI Center Task Forces.

Later on today, during the second session, I will inform you about the Center's operational activities and achievements in 2003, about our relations with the Member and Observer Countries and international partner institutions, as well as our approach to our future perspectives.

I would like to use this opportunity to inform you that the number of Permanent Observers to the SECI Center has increased substantially, reaching to 14 with Portugal, the Netherlands and the United Nations Mission to Kosovo (UNMIK) joining in 2003.

Last year, the relations between the SECI Center and ICPO-Interpol and the World Customs Organization (WCO) continuously improved. Representatives of the Center participated in various meetings of common interest organized by the two institutions, and negotiations for establishing an institutionalized cooperation framework are almost completed.

Also, in May 2004, the European Commission conducted an assessment on the functioning of the SECI Center and its regional role, as regards police, judicial and customs cooperation in the field of organized crime in the Western Balkans. A positive outcome of this evaluation could lead to the improvement of the Center's relations with the European law enforcement institutions, especially with Europol, and even to the institutionalization of these relations.

Understanding that law enforcement cooperation in the region is vital, the SECI Center has been constantly trying to consolidate this process and to extend the cooperation network, by providing assistance for the development of similar law enforcement initiatives, such as the GUUAM Virtual Center.

The SECI Center was also involved in a project aimed at strengthening the collaboration between law enforcement authorities and judicial authorities, providing support and facilitating the activity of the South East European Prosecutors Advisory Group (SEEPAG).

Beyond the operational results achieved during 2003, I ask everyone present here today to join us in calling for an even more active participation from all the actors involved in this year's planned operations. Later on today, we will be witnessing the countries' presentations on their cooperation and information exchange experiences through the SECI Center and we will establish together the priorities of the upcoming efforts to combat organized transborder crime.

SECI Regional Center for Combating Transborder Crime is a unique, regional, successful tool for preventing, detecting, investigating and prosecuting efforts of member countries' law enforcement agencies for struggling and eradicating crime on regional level as a part of the Global fight against all kinds of crime.

I would kindly ask all of you to be as straight-forward as you can and to share with us all your concerns and comments for enhancing cooperation through this existing instrument.

Thank you again for your participation in this important event.