



**Speech delivered by the Director of
the SECI Center, Mitja Mocnik
26th of May 2006**

**Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,**

Good morning, and welcome to the **Seventh Anniversary of the SECI Center.**

Thank you for accepting our invitation to celebrate together with us.

With appreciation to all involved and who put effort to upgrade the SECI Center and who contributed to its future development; especially liaison officers, staff members, ministers and high officials of the respective member states and observer countries, management (Dr. Ionas and Ms. Nenova) and independent experts who were involved in the Project of the Draft Convention, I am speaking today to review the achievements and to set out the challenges ahead for the SECI Center and in particular for our member countries and our new managing team.

Before doing this, I am pleased to recall the day of May 26, 1999, when the member countries of the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative entered into a bold agreement to bring together, for the first time, Police and Customs officers in a jointly funded and operated organization to combat trans-border crime.

The SECI Regional Center was launched in 2000 with the participation of 12 states: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Moldova, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia and Turkey.

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 SECI Center's progress. All this period, the SECI Center has played a major role in developing law-enforcement cooperation, and has contributed to the overall regional security and political stabilization of its member countries.

Behind the member countries, there are 16 other countries that have gradually been granted the status of observer to the SECI Center (and I welcome here Poland as our newest Observer as from yesterday). It is for the first time when altogether 28 states are cooperating on police and customs issues focused on South East Europe in the framework of a permanent information sharing and operations center. Italy and the United States have a permanent presence at the SECI Center through the representatives of the Italian Police, Guardia di Finanza, the US Department of Justice, FBI, DEA, and the US Secret Service.

The Center as the first and the only law enforcement organization in the SEE has identified the following threats in the region: human trafficking and migrant smuggling, drug trafficking,

smuggling of goods and customs fraud, smuggling of stolen vehicles, financial crime (money laundering, plastic card fraud, counterfeit currency, cyber-crime, intellectual property theft), terrorism (weapons of mass destruction, small arms and light weapons and terrorist organizations). The Center has established Task Forces targeting the same criminal areas¹, employing as basic working methods regional operations, coordinated investigations, strategic analysis projects and trainings. A Task Force on Container Security was established recently at the proposal of Greece, and we are already preparing a regional assessment of the container security problems in the region with a view to deciding and implementing a regional operation.

The flexibility of the SECI Agreement has brought outstanding privileges to the work of the Center. Our efforts were supported by all our partners and valuable initiatives were set out and finally implemented. The operational activities increased exponentially, from around 300 cases supported through the SECI channel of international information exchange in 2001 to more than 4000 in 2005.

Due to the SECI Center's secure and fast communications system (an encrypted virtual private network over internet, the voice and fax communications systems which are provided with the most advanced encryption facilities, and data communications systems which are compatible with the Interpol's 24/7 network), the information exchange is very much trusted by its users. That was why the regular information exchange through the SECI Center led to the development of important investigative cases and arrests.

Very soon, the participating agencies understood that the SECI Center is the gate providing for a so called 'legal practical extension' of their domestic enforcement powers into the jurisdiction of the other SECI member countries and a cost effective and valuable arrangement offering the multiplication of their resources by partnership and trust. The reinforced result was encouraging: offering information and intelligence, they could better reach their criminal targets wherever in the region.

The SECI Center has animated the regional law enforcement from the very beginning and made things move ahead firstly in basic and then in more advanced police and customs cooperation issues.

For example, in only four years, between 2002 and 2005, 21 region-wide operations were undertaken by the SECI Center Task Forces and 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 was even possible. But the operations did prove successful, and countries gained experience in such a matter. For example, during our one-week operation against smuggling of petroleum products in November last year, code named Black Pearl, Croatia alone initiated almost 700 information that was sent to other countries, and this is clear evidence that the cooperation is at work in the region.

¹ Areas are: Anti-Drug, Trafficking in Human Beings and Migrant Smuggling, Financial and Computer Crime, Anti-Fraud and Anti-Smuggling, Stolen Vehicles, Anti-Terrorism and Container Security.

After the operations, joint teams were then established in the region and dozens of coordinated investigations were developed with the financial and logistical support of the SECI Center.

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 relationship with other domestic partners, who were brought together under the umbrella of the SECI and shared the same operational goals.

Our countries may face global challenges but our regional law enforcement community is seizing unprecedented opportunities to succeed, building upon the important SECI Center partnership.

To give a recent example, not even 2 weeks ago a SECI Center coordinated investigation targeting cigarettes smuggling between Romania and Serbia and Montenegro resulted in 11 traffickers arrested on the territories of the two countries, as well as significant quantities of cigarettes and other goods being seized.

The success of such operations was possible because the prosecutors were always invited to attend the coordination meetings from the very beginning and only when they considered that the investigations were completed and there was sufficient evidence secured, the simultaneous arrests of the traffickers on the territories of the participating countries were made.

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 our member countries to participate as witnesses in court proceedings in another member country and is implemented in close cooperation with the law enforcement and judicial authorities of the member countries. In 2003 when the program started, 2 witnesses participated in court proceedings. Later we continued to implement this assistance program. During the last year 16 witnesses participated in trials in different SECI member countries.

This past year also marks the first-ever usage of a video-conference system in presenting testimony in the court proceedings in a South East European country. With the close cooperation with the FBI and the representatives of the US Dept. of Justice, we supported a case, where a witness from Moldova gave testimony through a video-conference system for a court hearing held in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Intelligence, intelligence, intelligence. Shared intelligence. It is all about that if we are to have the greatest impact on the criminal organizations that we are here to face.

I could go on, but the list of our accomplishments is simply too long to repeat here. At the heart of each success though, is the strong multi-lateral partnership at the SECI Center. Through this partnership, we cement old ties, forge new bonds, and, together, develop successful strategies to dismantle our shared regional targets.

In this respect, the substantial financial and expert leading support provided by the American Government, mostly through the Department of State, from the very beginning of our work has to be underlined. Assigned experts from the FBI, DEA, Department of Justice, and Secret Service have been sharing their experience with our liaison officers or other representatives of the law enforcement agencies from the member countries. With their valuable support, we have been able to extend our abilities to move forward in the operational area, resulting in fruitful outcomes which continued to enhance the activity of the SECI Center in the field of combating transnational organized crime.

Nevertheless, in 2004 our EU partners have brought to our attention the need to assume a leading role and prepare as an Eastern European law enforcement centre of excellence, taking advantage of our privileged position as the single law enforcement cooperation organization in South East Europe. And our partners were right: blinded by the ongoing successes, we appeared to have lost the sense of self-construction and inner building of the SECI Center. Our resources and initiatives went totally to providing services to our countries and less to prepare and shape the modernity and adaptability of the cooperation vector itself.

Retrospectively looking at how these results were achieved, namely working several times more issues today with the same budget and the same staff like 6 years ago, we had no fear of mistake when we affirmed that the working cooperation potential is huge at the SECI Center. This was how we started to seriously think the future of the regional cooperation on long term according to the European standards. The way ahead was clear: organizational change and preparedness for the challenges of tomorrow.

As the SECI Center managerial team, the key overarching challenges for us are:

- to build on our unprecedented record of operational achievement ensuring our member countries can win in the regional fight against transborder crime,
- to take key decisions in the coming period to ensure the short, medium and long term quality service to our countries,
- to sustain the momentum of organizational modernisation showing how investment and the programme of reform is delivering real improvements for our law enforcement agencies in their quest for better information exchange and operational cooperation, and
- to underline the SECI Center's commitment to contribute to enforcement of the laws and justice through coordinated measures to expand opportunity and tackle the most sophisticated criminal enterprises of trans-border nature.

Given this context, I am therefore informing you on our vision and how we propose to further deliver against regional threats while continually adapting to the increasingly complex challenges we face in the region.

I am convinced that the fight against the organized crime is of our common interest. Criminology at the global level and organized crime in the SEE and in the EU represents serious threat to our societies and is an obstacle for economic development and is also a great challenge for human rights and freedom. The SECI Regional Center for Combating Trans-border Crime has achieved a great deal in pioneering law enforcement cooperation in the region.

As I said before, our operational activities were possible due to the financial contributions of member countries but mainly due to observer countries like the United States. Without this support we would not be able to achieve such results in operational areas.

But the SECI member states are and will be the exclusive owners and they have the right of determination. **The Center must reflect their requirements, it must be resilient and with the capacity to do what is required to do. Independence is a “sine qua non” for a credible international organization. The Center must be provided with this capacity, both in legal framework and resources.** Without that we will not be able to be a valuable and equal regional partner in the fight against serious and organized crime. **The member states are the owners of the Center and they can rightly, decide the fate and future design of the organization.**

National Focal Points should be standardized so that they become single multi-agency of contact representing all competent authorities with access to national databases and strong links to prosecutors. NFP are fundamental to the Center concept.

Current operational **activity taking place under the auspices of the Task Forces needs to be reinforced by an expert staff team.** Our Task Forces have achieved an important role in developing the habit of cooperation and building new operational partnerships and new lines of communication. Analysis capabilities also need to be urgently addressed, as new analytical staff will increase the outputs of the Center regarding qualitative intelligence to be used by decision makers and operational support for our member countries.

The ability of the Center to analyze information is a key issue for the future, therefore we need an Intelligence System and rules available to allow the processing of personal data. **Information input into the organization should be based upon the tasks of the organization and should be properly planned.** It must be based upon rules which ensure high standards in terms of quality and which add value to the product.

Permanent observers and permanent advisers should be treated as **Special Strategic Partners and the relationship with existing Observers will continue.**

An important step in the efficient fight against cross-border crime is the **coordination between law enforcement authorities and prosecutor’s offices in the region.** In this respect SEEPAG (South East European Prosecutors Advisory Group) was set up and developed as a bridge between the Center and the judicial authorities in the region. **A mechanism for involving prosecutors** in the future is necessary to ensure full and legal coverage of operational options.

We are sure that the Center has more potential and its operational activities can be further developed. This was the reason why two years ago we started a project with EC for strengthening the Center capacity in fighting trans-border organized crime. Following the assessment made by experts of the EC in 2004, a new Center Strategy was adopted for the period of 2005 – 2010, which marked a turning point in the development of the Center. The Strategy is the basic document for the six-year period. Its realization should lead to the

implementation of the final long-term goal: the Center should become an international law enforcement organization in compliance with all international standards.

A European Commission assistance project to the SECI Regional Center for Combating Trans-Border Crime was launched in February 2006. The project was conducted over a 5 month period and established the organizational and development needs of the Center through the widest possible consultation.

The first area of this project considered the international status, the organizational structure, the relationship between the Center's component parts as well as its mandate. The second area focused on ways of building confidence in the use and exchange of sensitive data and, in particular, on the protection of personal data. The chief outcome of this project was a consolidated document encompassing all of these issues and which is described as a new Convention.

It would be highly desirable for the draft Convention to be released as soon as possible and in time. **The member states must have the opportunity to decide on the level and type of organization they want and the implementation phase will allow this to happen.** The draft Convention is simply a vehicle for the debate, discussions and negotiations that will ensue.² **The member states have the opportunity to decide their preferred quality and value of the new organization.** There is huge potential in the Center for developing as a strong regional tool for law enforcement to identify and support neutralize common threats.

To conclude, let me say that it is my strong belief that the SECI Center makes a valuable contribution to the efforts of all nations to combat trans-border crime by offering a specialized framework for police and customs cooperation. Of course, in one sense no amount of cooperation, information sharing, and equipment or, indeed, money will ever be "enough" to combat organized crime. **But the fact is that we are now far better cooperative in law enforcement matters in South East Europe than we were in the past**, both in terms of information exchange and operations coordination, and this make us look optimistically to the future.

Honorable guests, thank you for this opportunity to discuss these important issues concerning the transformation of the SECI Center. Much has been accomplished. Much remains to be done. But our strategic plan, the support from our partners, and most importantly, the commitment of our member countries, are guiding our prioritization and performance in support of the Center mission.

Thank you.

² If fully implemented, the Convention can provide independence, resilience and capacity needed to progress. This will only be feasible if greater investment is secured. The adage, "you get what you pay for" is as true in law enforcement as in anything else.