



**Briefing on the Ohrid Process on Border Security and Management
To the COWEB, 18 January 2007**

Mr Pieter Verbeek, Director of the Stability Pact Working Table III

1) Introduction/ thank you

Reminder on the format of the Ohrid Border Process

2) Last briefing before the COWEB in March 2005

Since then, progress in implementation and new decision on the future of OBP

Presentation in 2 parts:

- Latest developments in terms of implementation of the Ohrid commitments
- Evolution of the process and current status

3) Since the Ohrid Border Process entered into its implementation phase at the end of 2003, the countries have been reporting regularly on progress achieved in the implementation of the commitments agreed upon in May 2003. The three main objectives of the process are:

- Demilitarisation of all borders, meaning handing over of border control to civilian authorities
- Development and /or update and implementation of an Integrated Border Management Strategy and Action Plan
- Development and enhancement of cross-border cooperation

On the *first objective*, demilitarisation, we can say the results are fairly satisfying. Indeed, since the process started, the countries concerned by this demilitarisation process have achieved substantial progress.

- FYROM has completed its transfer in August last year;
- *Albania* is now working on improving the links and cooperation between the military who are in charge of the blue borders and the civilian authorities, with in mind for the mid-term, complete civilian control of these borders.
- *Serbia* is currently completing the transfer to the Border Police of its border with FYROM, getting closer to the completion of its process. Borders to Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, already are under the control of the Border Police.



The completion of the transfer to civilian authorities is scheduled for the first half of 2007.

Regarding the *second objective*, which concerns the IBM Strategy and Action Plan, we may say with confidence that all countries involved have made good progress since 2003. All six countries have adopted a National IBM Strategy. However, only four countries have adopted a National IBM Action Plan (Albania, Croatia, FYROM and Serbia). Two are still working on its development and should approve it soon. The fact that five countries out of six (all but Montenegro) have created an Inter-Agency Working Group to monitor the creation and implementation of the IBM Strategy and Action Plan is another good sign, but more work should be dedicated to the implementation of the legal framework.

The *third objective* of the OBP, cross-border cooperation is marked by the greatest disparities. Cross-border cooperation is assessed through two indicators: the signing of formal agreements with neighbouring countries and practical cooperation on the ground (exchange of information, joint patrols, exchange of liaison officers). While some countries have signed agreements with all or some of their neighbours, others have not signed agreements at all. Of course, the content of these agreements varies from one document to another, and some are more comprehensive than others. All countries have initiated practical cross-border cooperation, but while some countries have made significant progress (regular exchange of information, liaison officers in place, joint patrols etc.), some are only in their initial stage.

Therefore, after three years and a half, we can say that progress achieved within the framework of the OBP is quite substantial and justifies optimism for the future. However, much more work is needed in implementing existing legal frameworks and aligning them with EU standards, as well as enhancing cross border cooperation and implementing agreements already signed, such as Vienna Police Convention.

Now the second part of this presentation.

4) In the founding documents of the Ohrid Border Process, it was spelled out that 2006 would represent the end of a transition period during which countries were to implement short and medium terms commitments. This is why, at the beginning of last year, the four Partner Organisations decided to carry out an assessment of progress



achieved in order to decide upon the future of the process. They drafted a Questionnaire, which was sent to the countries concerned. After receiving the replies, Partners produced an assessment report, which was afterwards approved by all countries and partner organisations. On the basis of this report, all parties agreed that a one-year prolongation of the process would be necessary in order to finalise the implementation of the commitments taken in 2003. The Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact, Dr Erhard Busek, sent letters to the Ministers of Interior of the countries concerned, on behalf of the four Partner Organisations, and soon after received confirmation from these Ministers that all were ready to continue the process in 2007. At the Third Review meeting, held in Podgorica in November 2006, representatives of the countries and international organisations have decided accordingly.

Another conclusion derived from the assessment process, was that a more tailor-made approach should be adopted for 2007 when designing projects and activities for the countries concerned. In this respect, a list of specific areas for each country was drafted, producing a "Roadmap for 2007". Some common areas of work were added to this list:

- Cross-border cooperation and implementation of signed international agreements
- Adoption of a more integrated approach towards the 4 competent services involved in border management (Border Police, Customs, Veterinary and Phyto-Sanitary) with a special emphasis on Border Police-Customs cooperation
- Risk Analysis and Threats Assessment
- Cooperation with neighbouring EU member states where necessary to avoid isolation and making best use of lessons learnt

The four partner organisations are currently designing a joint work plan for this year and are considering the areas in which they could most effectively assist the countries. Coordination of activities and cooperation in the implementation of these activities between the partner organisations will be a priority. My colleague from the EC, Mr Hervé Bougé, will also surely be able to tell you more on the activities that the EC will carry out this year in this field, and also about the follow-up to the CARDS Programme, the IPA, in which integrated border management will appear once again.

Finally, I would like to mention that the contribution of the Stability Pact to the Ohrid Border Process is limited to acting as a Secretariat to the process, but also through its



other initiatives and projects, such as the Police Forum, the I-24/7 project or the OCTN.
(...)

Thank you