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Working Tables and Regional Table in Portoroz, 7- 8 June 2004

The meetings will follow the same format as in Tirana in December 2003. The three Working Tables will hold their meetings on the first day, 7 June, and the Regional Table will be held on the second day, 8 June 2004 in Portoroz (Slovenia).

As the Stability Pact marks its five-year anniversary this year, a commemorative event will be part of the Regional Table meeting in the morning of 8 June.

As usual, further information on the Working and Regional Table meetings will be placed on the SP website www.stabilitypact.org, as it becomes available.

SEESAC: Important Instrument to Fight Organised Crime

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), the continuing problems regarding antipersonnel land mines, military downsizing, fostering security dialogues, assisting civil-military co-operation, effective border security and management and the fight against organised crime and corruption, including trafficking in human beings, are all part of the Stability Pact's agenda to improve Human Security.

Many of these security issues are interrelated. Therefore, the proliferation and circulation of illicit SALW throughout South Eastern Europe

should not be addressed in isolation, but as part of an integrated agenda. Co-operation is needed in particular with some other of SP's security-related initiatives and Task Forces, such as the Initiative to Fight Organised Crime (SPOC) and the Police Forum for South Eastern Europe, the Regional Arms Control Verification and Implementation Assistance Centre (RACVIAC), and the Border Security and Management Issues Initiative (also called "Ohrid Border Process"). Co-operation is also needed with the South East European Co-operative Initiative's Regional Centre for Combating Transborder Crime in Bucharest.

SEESAC, the Belgrade-based South Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons – a joint project of UNDP and the Stability Pact – like these other initiatives has been created as a platform to stimulate regional co-operation. In the past few years, it has become the leading actor in the field of combating the threat of uncontrolled and excess SALW in SEE region. The Stability Pact will continue to support SEESAC as the main tool of implementation of the Stability Pact Regional Implementation Plan on SALW in eight countries in South Eastern Europe and as the main instrument for capacity-building in the area of SALW control, which should enable the governments of the region to keep addressing this issue in the future.

SEESAC has established a network of National Focal Points of Civil Society and other partners to support its activities and to guarantee implementation at the national level. A recent assessment of the functioning of this network has led to the conclusion that the role of the National Focal Points and their influence within the governmental structures in the respective countries should be strengthened substantially. The Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact has decided to raise this point with the governments of the countries concerned.

Our efforts aimed at fighting organised crime, corruption or international terrorism could hardly be successful without strong engagement of various international and national NGOs. Let me stress that we fully recognise and appreciate the role of the NGOs (like the Szeged Small Arms Process and Saferworld) in combating the proliferation of SALW, in raising public awareness, in engaging civil society in concrete actions in the field and in assisting journalists to inform the public about combating the problem.

Pieter Verbeek,
Director of Working Table III – Security Issues

SEECF Summit 21 April 2004, Sarajevo

The annual Summit of SEECF brought the Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina to a successful close. Romania assumed the new Presidency 2004–2005. Croatia became a full member of SEECF (previously observer), whereas the Summit mandated the next meeting of SEECF Foreign Ministers to respond favourably to Moldova's request for observer status in the organisation, which is an important regional partner of the Pact.

Excerpts from SC Busek's statement:

- **On Kosovo:** in the Europe of today violence cannot be a short cut to progress. Even though the image of the region received a blow, we must stand together to repair the damage... Demonstrations are a part of a functioning democracy. But violence against property and individuals is a crime and needs to be prosecuted.
- Multiple, open and fair elections have shown that the process of **democratisation** is irreversible. Considering the wars that were fought in the 90s, we are only dealing to a limited degree with military structures in security matters, but more often with Justice and Home Affairs. This is a sign of progress as well.
- Fostering **regional co-operation**, at the core of the mandate of the Stability Pact, is a precondition for closer European integration. There has been great progress in this area; both on a political level as well as in fields such as infrastructure, energy, migration and security policy. The Stability Pact has helped the region to make serious progress towards knitting itself into a single market of 55 million people.
- **Regional ownership** for Stability Pact-launched activities such as combating organised crime (SPOC), fighting corruption (SPAI), regional arms control (RACVIAC) or for the newly established Regional Forum of MARRI is a sign of an increased desire by the countries in region to have their own stake in the regional dimension of the reform process.
- Praised that a **SEECF Ministerial Conference of Defence Ministers** was held for the first time ever on 15 April. Given the conflict-ridden past in some of the SEECF countries, this was a very symbolic achievement.

- At the SEECP Summit in Sarajevo, SC Busek strongly commended the SEECP to hold a **Justice and Home Affairs Ministerial Conference in Bucharest on 18 May**, jointly with the SP. The Conference will focus on a joint campaign against organised crime, thus giving the necessary political support for fighting a problem which is tarnishing the image of SEE and depriving it of some of the benefits of the recovery the region has enjoyed in recent years.

Croatian and Macedonian EU Membership Application

In the eyes of the Stability Pact, the positive opinion by the European Commission on the Croatian EU-membership application illustrates that the Croatian way can be a guiding example for other countries in Southeast Europe. The Croatian membership application was deposited in early 2003 and the 'avis' of the EU Commission was made public 20 April 2004.

FYR Macedonia, which has filed a membership application on 23 March 2004, was called upon by the Special Co-ordinator at the SEECP Summit in Sarajevo to actively use the examination period of its application by the EU Commission as a momentum for achieving progress and pushing reforms.

Moldova and the Stability Pact

At a conference jointly organised by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation of Germany, the Moldovan Foreign Ministry and the Stability Pact, 1 March in Chisinau, it was revealed that the country is participating in many of the Stability Pact's activities, task forces and initiatives, albeit often with an extended timeline and tailored arrangements.

Moldova is participating in Stability Pact activities such as cross-border co-operation; in gender issues by fostering an increased participation of women in politics; in trade and investment promotion by including free trade; in energy and regional infrastructure as well as in the initiative to fight

organised crime. In the Regional Energy Market initiative, Moldova is an observer and aligned itself to the so-called Athens process designed to extend the legislation of the EU internal market for electricity and gas to South Eastern Europe. Regarding free trade, Moldova unilaterally signed up to the Memorandum of Understanding on trade liberalisation in June 2001, and has since completed negotiations with Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, and Serbia-Montenegro. An agreement with Bulgaria is in negotiation, while an existing Free Trade Agreement with Romania from 1994 has to be revised in order to be in line with Memorandum of Understanding of 2001.

SC Busek underlined that Moldova's involvement in the Stability Pact was instrumental for Moldova to familiarise itself with international bodies and to experience regional co-operation first-hand. Moldova joined the Stability Pact in June 2001.

For an overview of Stability Pact activities involving Moldova, see:

<http://www.stabilitypact.org/upload/documents/007-StabilityPactactivitiesinvolvingMoldova.doc>

Revised Strategy for Social Cohesion Initiative to be discussed in Paris 14 May

Following the conclusions of the 7th Regional Meeting of the Initiative on Social Cohesion, held last December 2003 in Brussels, ISC initiated a review process of its mandate, strategy and functions during the first months of 2004. The overarching purpose was to streamline the work of the ISC in its five sectors, but also within the broader context of Working Table II and other Stability Pact initiatives. The result of the process, reached through a series of participatory workshops with the key ISC stakeholders, is a clear understanding of the added value that the ISC brings to addressing social

issues in SEE through its regional approach. More specifically, the ISC is finalising its revised strategy and mission statement, which will also define sectorial objectives, achievable and activities for 2004. These will be discussed with the ISC constituency and endorsed at an extraordinary ISC Regional Meeting to be held on 14 May in

Paris, hosted by the Council of Europe Development Bank.

Investment Compact Activities

- A meeting in Vienna on 2-3 February reviewed a number of national Enterprises Policy Performance Assessments (EPPAs) prepared by the OECD. The reports were discussed with representatives from SEE countries responsible for SMEs.
- In Belgrade, 29 March, the second edition of the “White Book on Proposals for Improvement of the Investment Climate in Serbia” was launched, published by the Foreign Investor Council of Serbia.
- The 10th Meeting of the Project Team for the Investment Compact will take place in Paris on 5 May 2004. The meeting will take stock of the activities so far and map out the strategy and the activities for the rest of this year. An Investment Compact Donors Meeting will be held on 4 May.
- A Regional Roundtable on Investment Promotion “3rd Seminar on Investment Promotion for SEE” will take place in Tokyo in May, hosted by JICA and UNIDO.
- The 2nd OECD Ministerial Conference on SMEs “Promoting Entrepreneurship and Innovative SMEs in a Global Economy” will take place in Istanbul on 4-5 June.
- The third of the by now established Ministerial Conferences on Investment Promotion in Vienna will take place on 9 July 2004.

eSEE Working Group keeps the Pace of Reforms

After the successful Budapest Ministerial Conference on Information Society (IS), the eSEE Working Group held its first meeting this year in Podgorica, Montenegro on 26 March.

The meeting took stock of the progress made since the December meeting of the working group, particularly in relation to Guidelines for the National Strategies for IS Development and Unified Terms of Reference for the Establishment of the Cabinet Level Body for IS Development. The Secretariat presented the latest matrix regarding fulfilled obligations undertaken within the eSEE Agenda.

Steps towards a benchmarking training seminar were proposed. Furthermore, the eSEE Working Group started co-operation with the MARRI Initiative. The Regional Information Exchange Initiative was presented, with special attention paid to the issue of data protection and data exchange.

The next meeting will take place in Croatia, most likely in Cavtat on 10 June.

West Balkan Countries at Ministerial Conference on Information Society in Budapest

European leaders set, at the 2000 Lisbon summit, the ambitious objective for Europe to become “*the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world ... by 2010*”. The then candidate countries committed themselves to take up this challenge, and the Western Balkans aligned themselves to this so-called Lisbon process.

The European Ministerial Conference on Information Society “*New Opportunities in an Enlarged Europe*” took place in Budapest on 26-27 February 2004, and for the first time included all the eSEE Working Group countries within the Stability Pact as full participants. The fact that these countries have been invited and were mentioned in the final conclusions of this important conference is a good signal that South Eastern Europe is making significant progress in catching up with the eEurope processes.

In Budapest, the Ministers of the eSEE countries signed a Joint Statement on building an “Inclusive Information Society”. They committed themselves to apply the same norms and standards as practiced in the EU, including the new EU framework for electronic communications networks, and to continue with the implementation of the eSEE Agenda. The eSEE countries appealed for more support from the EU in learning from best practices and in particular from the experiences gained in the accession and candidate countries.

Energy Week in Athens

The third edition of the energy week in the framework of the joint EU Commission / Stability Pact Regional Energy Market Initiative (REM) will take place from 2-4 June in Athens. The meetings

of different bodies working on implementing the so-called Athens process, which aims at creating a liberalised electricity market by 2005 along the lines of the EU legislation, will take stock of the progress made in the participating SEE countries. In order to complement this benchmarking, meetings of the Southeast Europe Task Force of CEER (Council of European Energy Regulators) and of the Southeast Europe Transmission Systems Operators will take place in Athens in parallel. The last sequence of the energy week, 3-4 June, will be dedicated to a meeting of the Athens Forum, the main co-ordinating platform for the establishment of REM. The Athens review will mainly cover electricity, while the Gas Strategy Paper has yet to be approved by the European Commission. The next energy week is expected to be held in Belgrade in Autumn 2004.

**Employment and Entrepreneurship in
SEE
High Level Meeting
Bucharest 26 and 27 May 2004**

One of WT II's key tasks for 2004 is to ensure a convergence between Stability Pact activities aimed at improving the overall business climate and our efforts to enhance social cohesion throughout South Eastern Europe (SEE).

As part of our efforts, the Stability Pact in conjunction with the Romanian SEECF Presidency and the Irish EU Presidency, will hold a high level meeting on the themes of entrepreneurship and employment in Bucharest on 26 and 27 May. The meeting is intended to complement a number of Stability Pact activities already underway, including the follow up to the Bucharest Ministerial Meeting on Employment and the SME flagship initiative of the Investment Compact. The meeting should improve awareness of the different aspects these initiatives and identify priority actions to be taken to improve the environment for both.

Participants at this meeting will be senior officials and experts from ministries responsible for SME development and ministries of employment/social affairs in SEE; international organisations and institutions active in the fields of entrepreneurship and employment including the OECD's Local Economic and Employment Development initiative.

Further info can be obtained from
mary.omahony@stabilitypact.org

**Trade Liberalisation in SEE – an on-going
Process with 27 Agreements Signed**

The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted the 14th meeting of the Stability Pact's Working Group on Trade Liberalisation and Facilitation in Budapest on 4 and 5 March. This was the Group's first meeting since the meeting of SEE Trade Ministers in Rome in November 2003 and good progress was reported on the implementation of the Group's Strategy and Action Plan for 2004. As of 30 March, 27 free trade agreements (FTAs) have been signed and the majority of these are already in force with the remainder expected to come into force in the coming months. The Group is now focused on the issue of identifying and reducing non-tariff barriers to trade and welcomed the technical assistance being provided by the EC and the Swiss Government to assist their officials to tackle this issue. Bulgaria, as the current holders of the CEFTA Presidency made a comprehensive presentation on the objectives and structure of CEFTA. The Group has agreed to examine options for further harmonisation on the network of bilateral FTAs.

BAC Update

The Business Advisory Council for SEE had its first meeting of the year on 12 February in Sofia under the Chairmanship of Mr. Pierre Daures, Executive Vice President of the Bouygues Group (France). The BAC focussed on pressing economic issues facing Bulgaria and organised a series of business round tables on public private partnerships in communal services, transport corridors and food processing and agriculture. The BAC Board presented the recommendations from these roundtables to the Prime Minister after the meeting.

The next meeting of the BAC will be held in Bled, Slovenia, on 10-11 May and will focus on promo-

ting education and training programs for mid-level public servants in the region.

Local Democracy Ministerial Conference Planned

The Stability Pact has initiated the organisation of a Ministerial Conference in Autumn 2004, in Zagreb, on "Effective Democratic Governance at Local and Regional Level". The Conference will be organised by the Council of Europe, in close co-operation with the European Commission. The conference will give Ministers in charge of local and regional governance a platform to exchange views, reaffirm their countries' commitment to effective local and regional democratic governance, and to agree on initiatives to be taken at domestic and regional levels. The Conference is designed as a regional contribution to the Council of Europe Ministerial Conference on Local Democracy scheduled for next winter in Warsaw.

NALAS: From Network to Official Association

The Network of Associations of Local Authorities in SEE (NALAS) met in Moltalino, Italy, on 5-6 March 2004, and approved its action plan for 2004-2006 and its official statutes. Based on that, NALAS will be transformed from a network to an official association, during the 11th Plenary Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, on 27 May 2004 in Strasbourg.

It was also decided that beyond the conference in Budva that took place on 5-6 April 2004 on environment issues, four other seminars will be organised: in September 2004 in Croatia on Capacity Building of Local Authorities; in November 2004 in Slovenia on Local Partnerships; at the outset of 2005, a seminar in Greece on Local Economic Development; and in Brcko on Comparative Legislative Analysis. It is noteworthy that many donors have shown a special interest in Local Democracy issues (WB, USAID, UNDP etc.).

Generally, this year is a real challenge for NALAS, since responsibilities from CoE are transferring to the local partners-associations. Continuing guidance from CoE and strong interest from SP regarding donors co-ordination and infor-

mation are both necessary. On the other hand, NALAS will strengthen its co-operation and information exchange with the local authorities in every country of the region and encourage local and regional initiatives among mayor offices and municipalities. In addition, NALAS will define its medium-term development strategy.

Cross-Border Co-operation

Beyond NALAS, there are other local authorities' networks initiated throughout the region and by international NGOs such as Citizens Pact, East West Institute. The Stability Pact is referring to the above within its cross-border co-operation activities in a co-ordinating fashion..

As far as the various Euroregions in SEE are concerned, the SP is directly involved with four of them, mainly in partnership with the East West Institute. Since the beginning of the year, SP has focused its activities on the South Adriatic, Nis / Skopje / Sofia and Ohrid / Prespa Euroregions and the Glijane / Kumanovo / Presevo microregion.

Update on Education

□ The Memorandum of Understanding on Education, signed on 27-28 July 2003 in Nicosia by most of the SEE governments, was also signed by Albania and Moldova, in December 2003, by Kosovo / UNMIK in February 2004, and by Croatia in April 2004, during the 3rd Informal Conference of Ministers of Education of SEE, in Istanbul, organised by the Council of Europe. The main topic of the conference was the "Strengthening the Teaching Profession as a Driving Force for Development".

□ The Task Force organised the 3rd Working Meeting of the Senior Officials in Belgrade, 8-9 December 2003, during which participants discussed the recent developments regarding the EU "Detailed Work Programme" and the Bologna process. The next meeting will take place on 21-22 May, in Zagreb.

□ A two-day regional capacity building seminar on decentralisation took place in Bucharest on 6-7 February 2004. The Task Force is also in the process of moving its ERI Secretariat from Vienna to the region, strengthening regional ownership.

□ The Task Force will organise the third expert seminar in the framework of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) on 7-8 May 2004 in Vienna. This meeting will provide a platform in order to share information on the latest trends and best practices regarding lifelong learning strategies in EU member states and SEE countries. The idea is to discuss a possible joint position of SEE Ministries on lifelong learning strategies to be presented at the 8th Conference of European Ministers of Education. The conference will be organised by the Norwegian Ministry of Education jointly with the European Commission and the Irish Presidency on 24-25 June 2004 in Oslo. [<http://www.odin.dep.no/ufd/educonf2004/>]

□ A coherent lifelong learning strategy is not only a precondition for reaching the aims of "Education and Training 2010". It also becomes increasingly important in the framework of ongoing national reform efforts of Ministries of Education and Higher Education in South Eastern Europe. The issue of lifelong learning was therefore specifically addressed by the Declaration of Ministers of Education and Higher Education on "Life Long Learning, Adult Education and Employability" signed in Skopje. [<http://www.iiz-dvv.de/deutsch/aktuelles/Skopjeliteratur/deklaration.htm>].

□ International conferences on education in Moldova and FYR Macedonia in June 2004: the project "Strategy 2010" reflects the TF's overall focus on mid- and long-term system development at national and regional level. It is based on 10 comprehensive analyses of the status of education systems in SEE carried out by the OECD. The results of these thematic reviews have already been presented in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro and Kosovo promoting an inclusive consultation process among key actors in education on reform priorities and the identification of ways for funding their implementation. The Task Force plans to organise further conferences in FYR Macedonia and Moldova in June 2004.

→ The conference in FYR Macedonia will, among other topics, cover the issue of increased decentralisation as one of the major elements of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. A preparatory seminar will take place in June.

→ The conference in Moldova will support the consultation on education reform providing a wider discussion forum such as the Stability Pact. It is an important instrument for donor co-ordination and identification of funding

possibilities, also enabling the country to find its place in the wider international framework.

Media Task Force Meeting in Brussels

The MTF will hold its biannual meeting on 24 May 2004 in Brussels. Representatives from international organisations, the media in SEE and ministries of foreign affairs will discuss the current media situation in the region. Discussions will focus on public broadcasting, libel legislation and on financial support being provided to the media. Of particular note and following the recent crisis in Kosovo, there will be a discussion on appropriate responses to both hate speech and broadcasting which incites violence. This will provide additional regional input for the panel discussion to be held on this subject at the upcoming Working Table/Regional Table meeting in Portoroz on 7-8 June 2004.

Developments in the Media Task Force

As of January 2004, the MTF has commenced a legal research project which provides clear information on the status of media legislation in SEE (updated monthly). It focuses on three categories of media legislation: broadcasting, libel and access to information. In particular, the following issues are addressed:

- Licensing procedures / division of frequencies to broadcasters. (Are the available licenses and frequencies allocated in a fair and transparent manner?).
- Statute / mandate / composition of regulatory bodies. (Can the regulatory body govern the media independently of political interference? Are regulations fair and impartial?).
- Management / council of the public broadcaster / independence. (Is the management of the public broadcasters editorially independent and sufficiently insulated from political interference?).
- The balance between private and public broadcasters. Funding issues such as changes in advertising limits, remit of the public broadcasters or audience reach.
- Penal and civil code changes relating to defamation. (Is there sufficient protection against undue defamation charges? For instance the level

of fines, burden of proof, special protection of public figures?).

- Progress or delays in adoption and implementation of Access to Information laws.

The MTF notes that problems still plague the media landscape in SEE as more progress is needed on the reform of media legislation both in regards to adoption and implementation.

The MTF has also conducted their annual review of media projects; 12 proposals were approved and all 12 received funding pledges. These projects further the implementation of legislation in line with European standards and the production of quality television programs. In the latter field, an increasing number of programmes continue to be both professionally produced and widely circulated throughout the region.

The MTF remains strongly engaged with providing support to its media working groups throughout SEE. In addition, the SP MTF donor forum provides a platform for donors, media experts from the region, intergovernmental organisations and NGOs active in media development to discuss the major issues stemming from the region.

Parliamentary Co-operation

The Stability Pact has welcomed Ms. Petra Blaess (Germany) as Senior Consultant to the Stability Pact on Parliamentary Co-operation from February to June 2004. She is in charged of:

- defining the objective of the parliamentary co-operation dimension in the framework of the SP, and
- developing a concept for enhanced parliamentary co-operation activities in 2005.

Blaess is working in post-co-operation with the already existing SP Parliamentary Troika (EU Parliament, OSCE and CoE Parliamentary Assemblies) and the Parliamentary Co-operation NGO Network. This will include an evaluation of past and current projects, a design for a new strategy, and a new plan of activities. Her assessment and proposal will be presented during a panel discussion at the Working Table Meeting in Portoroz, 7 June 2004.

A meeting of the Parliamentary Co-operation Task Force took place in Strasbourg 29 April 2004. The members of the Task Force were invited to comment on Ms. Blaess' provisional conclusions and inform each other of their plans for 2004-2005. In

addition, co-ordination mechanisms were discussed, in particular the creation of a web-based Parliamentary Information Network.

Gender Task Force

The Stability Pact Gender Task Force has noted a number of successes in 2004. The 'Women Can Do It III' Project (Locally Elected Women Making a Difference) has implemented 11 rather diverse National Gender Issue Campaigns throughout Southeast Europe. The Social Dialogue/Empowerment of Women in Trade Unions BiH – Montenegro project has got off to a successful start with field seminars well underway for women trade unionists from 4 branches. The follow-up to the fieldwork phase will begin in the fall with a plan of action for establishing social dialogue with relevant government officials on issues defined as priority to women workers. Outreach to NGOs and the public will also be incorporated into future project activities as important elements for strengthening the quality of social dialogue and the public's understanding of the position of women workers.

As for upcoming events, the GTF Regional Centre in Zagreb is planning a strategic session with Croatian Government, Parliamentary, and Civil Society Representatives at the end of May. As a result, the GTF expects to receive feedback on new priorities in gender issues given the recent adoption in Croatia of the Gender Equality Act (2003) and the resulting establishment of the Office for Gender Equality and Ombudsman for Gender Equality.

A description of projects requiring immediate attention by the donors was recently sent to all National Co-ordinators.

Regional DPPI Meeting, Ig, Slovenia, 4-6 April 2004

The meeting was hosted by the Ministry of Defence Administration for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief of the Republic of Slovenia. The objective of the Regional DPPI Meeting and for the first meeting of the Directors/Heads of Disaster Management national authorities was to review past and planned activities to facilitate regional co-ordination and support in disaster preparedness and prevention for natural and man-made disasters in South Eastern Europe.

Participants discussed in-depth project facilitation and implementation, the DPPI Work Plan for 2004 and collaboration with other partners and agreed to implement further the DPPI Action Plan.

In his welcome address, Director of the Administration of the Republic of Slovenia for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief, Mr. Bojan Zmavc, pointed out the importance of the co-operation within the DPPI, which is visible also in the participation at this meeting attended by 11 countries from SEE with 8 Directors/Heads of DM national authorities and other DPPI partners: Sweden, IFRC, UNDP.

A Joint Fire-fighting Unit (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia & Montenegro) exercise was announced for 27 May 2004 in Budva, Montenegro. Deputy Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact John Riddle announced his presence.

Visit of SC Busek to RACVIAC

Together with Croatian Assistant Minister of Defence Policy, Jelena Grcic Polic, Special Co-ordinator Erhard Busek visited the Regional Arms Control Verification and Implementation Assistance Centre, (RACVIAC) near Zagreb, on 24 February 2004. Addressing one of the specific seminars on "Arms Control", Busek painted a very positive picture of the achievements of the centre in its three years of existence. It has made a significant contribution to arms control training and has fostered comprehensive security dialogue and expanded co-operation in Southeastern Europe. RACVIAC's activities are a very direct contribution to stabilising Southeast Europe and SC Busek thanked the host country Croatia for its continued support.

MARRI — New Regional Forum and Regional Centre in Skopje

The first Regional Forum on asylum, migration and displacement, composed of Ministers and Senior Officials of the 5 SAP countries under the auspices of the SEECF, which took place in Herceg-Novi 5 April, considered that after several years of displacement, many remaining displaced have begun new lives and are less and less likely to return to their places of origin, but that also those who had returned still faced considerable economic and social difficulties.

Therefore, Ministers agreed that a move from a refugee status to citizenship ensuring non-discriminatory access to social, economic and cultural rights was needed alongside the continued efforts to facilitate returns as the preferred option. This is also seen as vital to remove one of the obstacles for Western Balkan countries on their way to European integration, as spelled out in the Thessaloniki Agenda of June 2003.

In order to support the MARRI Regional Forum, a Regional Centre will be established in Skopje. It will act as centre of competence for MARRI issues and function as secretariat for the Regional Forum. The establishment of the Regional Centre and the Regional Forum will be based on a Memorandum of Understanding between the Western Balkan countries, which is expected to be signed no later than June 2004. Albania will hold the chair for the first year of the Regional Forum.

This instrument will increase the regional ownership of the MARRI process and will be staffed and managed by experts from Southeast Europe with international support where needed. Experts estimate that most of the remaining 900,000 refugees or internally displaced cases in the region could be settled permanently if the responsible governments rigidly adhere to the access to rights and citizenship approach.

MARRI — Housing and Informal Settlements at Vienna Workshop in May

Aiming at improvement of urban management capacity and regularisation & upgrading of informal settlements in South Eastern Europe, Stability Pact's Migration, Asylum, and Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI) intends to strengthen the momentum of existing regional efforts by adopting a two-level approach. The main objectives of this regional approach are to catalyse the creation of policy frameworks, programmes and institution-building at the national level as well as supporting capacity building to improve policy- and project implementation at the municipal level.

In this context, Stability Pact / MARRI and IDM (Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe) will host a one-day working session in Vienna on 27 May 2004 bringing together high-level officials from all SAP countries in order to discuss appropriate regional action, which will lead to a ministerial '*Declaration on the implementation of National Policy Frameworks and Programs Regarding Informal Settlements*'. The

declaration is expected to be signed at the upcoming conference on *'Regularisation and Upgrading of Informal Settlements & Improvement of Urban Management Capacity in SEE'* 28 September – 1 October 2004 in Vienna.

Regional Co-operation of Public Prosecutors begins to bear Fruit

A group of prosecutors who met for the first time in Belgrade in December 2003 have formed the nucleus of an emerging network of public prosecutors in the Southeast Europe, including Turkey, Slovenia, Greece and Hungary. The South East European Public Prosecutors Advisory Group (SEEPAG), as the grouping is called, cannot yet be considered an institutionalised network, but its members quickly started to co-operate through nominated points of contact and played a role in the recent conviction of a trafficker to a prison term of nine years. Erhard Busek, in both his capacities as Special Co-ordinator of the SP and Co-ordinator of the Southeast European Co-operative Initiative (SECI), welcomed this initiative as an indication that cross-border co-operation is rightly starting to engulf the various branches of the judiciary.

In April, the SECI Center hosted the second SEEPAG meeting in Bucharest to ensure close co-operation between SECI Center law enforcement liaison officers and public prosecutors. The members agreed to break up into several working groups dealing with issues such as witness protection, data protection issues and narcotics. The prosecutors emphasised the importance of this initiative in order to effectively challenge and curtail organised crime in the Balkans. The process also corresponds with the aim of the so-called Thessaloniki EU-Western Balkans Forum, which stressed the importance of regional co-operation among public prosecutors.

Antidrug Units in SEE

On 22-23 of April 2004, with the support of the Croatian Ministry of Interior, the meeting of the Chiefs of Antidrug Units in SEE took place in Zagreb, co-organised by the SP Police

Forum Working Group and SEPCA Board on Organised Crime.

The participants, from all the SEE countries (with the exception of Albania) and international partners (Interpol, European Commission, EUPM, SECI Centre, UNMIK, Italy, Norway, Spain, US – ICITAP), discussed the National Antidrug Strategies and the possibilities to develop the regional co-operation on a formal and informal basis. A special part was dedicated to the national action plans on stolen vehicles.

Main conclusions:

- The main objectives of the meeting were achieved: informal contacts between the chiefs of antidrug units and discussion of the National Antidrug Strategies. A follow-up was agreed to.
- Regional co-operation is working well through different formal mechanisms: bilateral agreements and the SECI Centre.
- National strategies have to be drafted and implemented, where needed.
- Legislation has to be adopted according to the EU acquis, with regional and international support.
- Internal inter-agency co-operation should be developed.
- International co-operation through Interpol must be enhanced.

Anti-Corruption Initiative

On 5-6 May, the Republic of Montenegro will host the SPAI Steering Group meeting in Sveti Stefan. This meeting will be the first one organised by the newly established SPAI Regional Office in Sarajevo. The ambitious agenda includes discussions of the national anticorruption strategies and the co-operation with all the interested international partners: Council of Europe, OECD, European Commission, American Bar Association, World Bank, UNODC, and donor countries (Norway, Switzerland, France, USA, Italy). Other international NGOs active in the field (Transparency International, Open Society Institute) will be actively involved.

STAFF NEWS

Haralambos Kondonis, seconded by the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has joined the Working Table I team in January, dealing with local democracy & cross-border co-operation, education and youth, and reconciliation.

Vera Budway has left Brussels and is now working out of the SECI Vienna Office, still covering SP activities in the domain of Local Democracy and Cross-Border Co-operation.

Bettina Scheurer has taken over the position of 'Personal Assistant to the Special Co-ordinator' in February.