



**13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Working Table III**  
**29 May 2006, Belgrade**

**Opening address by the Chair of Working Table III,**  
**Ambassador Janez Premože**

*Check against delivery*

1. Today's meeting will both assess what has been achieved in the last half year within our initiatives, and will look ahead at how these initiatives may further progress towards full regional ownership against the background of decision making on the future of regional cooperation in SEE. This second question will be addressed during the two panel discussions ahead of us. But now let me first make some brief remarks on what has been accomplished since our meeting in Prague last November.

2. Fighting organised crime and corruption remains a key area for the SEE countries on their way to European integration. Our three initiatives in this area have each been making valuable contributions.

3. The initiative to fight organised crime, SPOC, with its predominantly legal expertise, has set as its main priority to create a strong partnership with the SECI Regional Centre to Combat Trans-border Crime. The SPOC Secretariat will support with legal assistance the Centre's operational Task Forces and in this connection specific tasks have been identified together with the management of the SECI Centre. We will hear more about this during panel one. Apart from that, some of the SPOC Secretariat's products, like the research on witness protection and the matrixes on the implementation of the UN conventions on trans-border crime and terrorism, have been put on-line and are also being distributed here. SPOC is also engaged in strengthening the links between law enforcement officers and public prosecutors in SEE involved in combating trans-border organised crime.

4. Also the Police Forum Initiative has been strengthening its partnership with the SECI Center. In March they co-organized the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regional Conference on Stolen Vehicle Crime in Slovenia. The participants agreed to strengthen their fight against Stolen Vehicle crime, both by establishing a legal and institutional basis for more effective law enforcement, by standardizing their national programs and by coordinating regional activities, with the support of the SECI Centre. Cooperation with the South Eastern European Police Chief Association has also grown. SEPCA and the SECI Centre are seen as regional partners to partake in the Police Forum projects, helping to move these projects and initiatives towards regional ownership. The Organised Crime Training Network has continued with providing training to police officers dealing with organised crime and with building operational networks among them. The Police Forum together with Interpol are progressing with the introduction of the I-24/7 system, linking main border crossings in SEE with the Interpol data base, thereby facilitating the identification at the borders of missing persons, stolen documents and vehicles.

5. During our first panel session the chair of SPAI, Ugo DRAETTA, will describe the case of SPAI as an example of an initiative on its way towards full regional ownership. There is no question about it that without major progress in dealing with corruption SEE countries are facing not only an uphill battle towards the EU, but also major

obstacles in catching up with the rest of Europe economically. The SPAI Secretariat in Sarajevo has developed into a very useful tool for regional cooperation and may indeed be called a center of excellence on anticorruption in SEE, deserving strong support from international partners, including the EU.

6.The Ohrid Border Process is in its fourth year and before the end of the year a decision needs to be taken on either some form of continuation or to conclude the process. Obviously, the assessment, which is currently underway on progress achieved on the implementation of the Ohrid commitments by the Western Balkan countries, will provide the arguments either way. Whatever the outcome, however, I believe it is fair to say that this model has proved a quite successful format.

7.The Migration Asylum Refugee Regional Initiative (MARRI), initiated by the Stability Pact, has been owned by the Western Balkan countries for almost two years now. Working Table III experts have been supporting MARRI since then, in particular in the development of the MARRI strategy and the Programme for 2006-2007, both of which were adopted by the MARRI Regional Forum early April. With the appointment of the new Director of the MARRI Centre in Skopje there are good reasons to raise the expectations concerning MARRI's role as an essential tool for regional cooperation on migration issues in the Western Balkans.

8.On Small Arms and Light Weapons SEESAC has been increasingly acknowledged as a standard setting initiative for regional cooperation in combating the proliferation of SALW. Their success has attracted interest and financial support from the EU as well as the OSCE. To reflect this SEESAC has adopted earlier this month an updated regional implementation strategy, and SEESAC and its member countries are now also providing their expertise to countries in neighbouring regions.

9.During our second panel we will look at how RACVIAC has been developing its role and its agenda as a regional cooperation tool. Since Prague RACVIAC's Defence Conversion initiative has started to unfold with the first meetings of the three working groups. In the coming months the first project proposals are to be expected, but clearly defence conversion is a long-term process of which the success will mainly depend on local good governance, with a relatively modest supportive role for international partners.

10.Finally, the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative, last but not least, has started with the strong involvement of regional partners to develop a new training program for 2007-2008, which is expected to focus more than before on specific needs and to make an increased use of the region's own potential and expertise for providing trainings. Another ambitious project, which is being prepared, is to bundle regional capacities to be better prepared to tackle, and mitigate the consequences of future flooding disasters. Also, DPPI is considering how to strengthen its institutional and financial basis with a larger role for the regional partners.