



Working Table III Meeting
Sofia, 17 May 2005

Opening Statement by Ambassador Janez Premoze,
Chair of the Working Table III

Dear Special Coordinator,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all let me thank our Bulgarian hosts for making available these excellent conference facilities to us today.

As you know, the Special Coordinator has requested the Chairs of the three Working Tables to select one key issue for their meetings and for our meeting we have selected Defence Conversion. In this opening statement, however, I will also touch on other Working Table III issues which are not on our agenda for today, such as some of the Justice and Home Affairs issues, like fighting organised crime and corruption.

Since our last meeting in Skopje, we have been able to raise the profile of defence conversion – as *SP core activity for 2005* – on the agenda in SEE. The Stability Pact has co-organised the SEECP Defence Ministerial Meeting and the High-level expert Meeting, both focusing on defence conversion, which took place in Bucharest on 30 – 31 March. I would like to thank the former Romanian SEECP CiO as well as the colleagues from the WT III Defence Conversion Initiative and RACVIAC for their efforts in preparing this important event. *(I am looking forward to hearing more detailed information about the outcome of this meeting from the representative of the current SEECP CiO).*

Altogether, the most promising and essential development of the Bucharest conference is the growing willingness of SEE governments to assume regional ownership for defence conversion, by creating for the first time a joint regional policy framework. Through this framework the countries concerned and the supporters from the donor community will be able to operate more effectively and in a much more coordinated manner. Let's now use this political momentum.

Regarding facilitating a more integrated regional approach for defence conversion the Defence Ministers have suggested a special role for the Regional Arms Control Verification and Implementation Assistance Centre (RACVIAC) in Zagreb. Gen. Stergios Papatīs, Director of RACVIAC, will give us his views on how the role of RACVIAC as a regional centre for defence conversion could be strengthened. Let me express at this point– through Gen. Papatīs - my sincere appreciation to the members of the Multinational Advisory Group (MAG), who recently responded positively to the suggestions regarding RACVIAC's role contained in the Declaration of the Ministers of Defence. Indeed, the MAG has set a major step forward and is now preparing a decision on the modalities for making defence conversion one of the key dimensions of RACVIAC's future activities.

I am fully aware that the progress achieved could hardly have become reality without the active support of our international partners. First of all, I would like to mention our colleagues from NATO HQ, and in particular from the Defence and Security Economics Directorate, who continue to take the lead in our defence conversion initiative.

Our "Defence Conversion Initiative" has been strengthened recently with the appointment of a co-chair, BrigGen (ret.) Henny van der Graaf, who is kindly seconded by the Dutch Government. I use this opportunity to formally introduce him to all of you and to wish him good luck in his efforts.

Also the substantial contributions of other international organisations, individual donor countries, NGOs, in particular the Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) and the Bonn International Centre for Conversion (BICC), should be highlighted. We also continue to develop – especially through informal contacts – our relationship with relevant International Financial Institutions and at the same time are hopeful that other key partners, in particular the EU, will lend their support.

Many countries in the region are looking to the experience of others who have completed the transition into the Euro-Atlantic structures. Therefore, I was very pleased by the fact that SP WT III has co-organized with SaM and the Visegrad Group countries (CZ, PL, SK, H) a workshop on existing problems in the conversion of the defence industry sector in Serbia and Montenegro, by examining how "lessons learnt" in V4 countries could be shared or used. This is exactly the process which we would like to continue supporting.

Leaving now the area of defence conversion proper and before going into the area of SALW, I would note that the Defence Ministers have also emphasized the importance of addressing the issue of the destruction of surplus weapons and ammunition and have requested for international support and expertise in this connection. And here we are entering the area of expertise of SEESAC. But regarding SEESAC let me first underline that again progress has been achieved in the area of combating the threat of uncontrolled and excess SALW in the SEE region. WT III has continued close cooperation with UNDP through the South Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC). Many thanks to Mr. Adrian Wilkinson, SEESAC Team Leader, and his team for the outstanding job he and his team are doing so far. But as I indicated, SEESAC's expertise might also very well be used to assist SEE countries in addressing their surplus weapons and ammunition problems. I invite SEESAC to consider the request by the Defence Ministers for technical support in this regard as a matter of priority: how SEESAC could support this process, together with whom, and what further means they would need in this regard.

As far as the second theme on our agenda today is concerned let me inform you that Working Table III has continued to support the work of the MARRI Regional Forum on Migration, Asylum and Refugee issues. Now that the ownership of the MARRI Initiative has been transferred from the Stability Pact to the Western Balkan countries, the region has started to identify its own areas of priority in the field of migration, asylum and displacement issues for closer cooperation. The Tirana Declaration adopted last month by the Ministerial MARRI Regional Forum brings a new and regional dynamic to the discussions on visas and also reconfirms priority for finding durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons, inter alia through a reoriented Access to Rights program. I believe that the Access to Rights program should be implemented and further developed as much as possible in close cooperation between the governments, the European Commission, the OSCE and the UNHCR. Today the current MARRI Presidency in Office, Serbia and Montenegro, will further elaborate on their priorities for this year on these and other substantive MARRI issues.

The Ohrid Process on Border Management and Security became one of the key components of the JHA Ministerial dialogue between the Western Balkans and the EU last December. Now, we have to start addressing the question of the future of the whole process, i.e. until the end of 2006 and after. Therefore, the countries concerned and the partner organizations will meet in Vienna on 31 May – 1 June, both to assess the implementation of the existing commitments and to start the discussions on the future of the process.

Briefly about other SP WT III activities, in particular the fight against organized crime. In the framework of SPOC, we continue to focus on capacity-building, awareness-raising and legislative reforms, now also with increased emphasis on enhancing parliamentary cooperation in the field of combating organized crime and advocating effective implementation of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. SPOC is also continuing its facilitating role concerning the rapprochement between the SECI Regional Centre for the Combating of Trans-Border Crime and Europol and EU Member States. The SPOC team has also followed the example of the SPAI team and has started a tour to visit counterparts in the capitals of the region to intensify contacts.

The Police Forum, increased the number of its projects to five, focusing on training, establishing and strengthening regional police networks dealing with organised crime. I am particularly pleased that the Organised Crime Training Network, financially supported by Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, has now entered its implementation phase with the appointment of a Slovenian project manager.

Equally, I am satisfied that the region is now taking over more and more responsibilities for the anticorruption initiative (SPAI). At the meeting of representatives from the private sector and the SEE Ministers of Justice last week in Brussels, concrete measures to fight corruption hampering the SEE business and investment climate were discussed. The Ministers also agreed on a list of specific measures.

Finally, a few words about DPPI. Also this initiative is moving towards greater regional ownership with the move of its Secretariat into SEE. Such a logistic step usually needs to be accompanied by political and legal steps, and I suggest that the DPPI Steering Group will set up a small working group of relevant experts to develop a proposal.

Thank you.