



FINAL DECLARATION

of the Meeting of Ministers of Justice and Ministers of the Interior and of Public Order of the South East European Cooperation Process

„Standards of the European Union and the Rule of Law in South Eastern Europe“

Zagreb, 12 – 13 April 2007

The Meeting of Ministers of Justice and Ministers of the Interior and of Public Order of the SEECP Participating States was held in Zagreb on 12 and 13 April 2007 under the Croatian Chairmanship-in-Office of the SEECP to address the topics of „Standards of the European Union and the rule of law in South Eastern Europe“.

The Minister of Justice Mrs. Ana Lovrin and the Minister of the Interior Mr. Ivica Kirin chaired the Meeting, in which participated the following Ministers of Justice: Mr. Ilir Rusmali; Mr. Bariša Čolak; Prof. Georgi Petrov Petkanov; Mr. Anastasis Papaligouras; Mr. Mijahlo Manevski; Mr. Vitalie Pîrlog; Mr. Ion Codescu, State Secretary and Mr. Alper Tunga Akgülen, Investigating Judge; Ministers of the Interior: Mr. Bujar Nisahani, Minister; Mr. Tarik Sadović, Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Security; Mr. Byron Polydoros, Minister of Public Order; Mr. Boyko Kotzev and Mr. Refat Elmazi, Deputy Ministers; Mr. Valentin Zubic, First Deputy Minister; Mr. Alexandru Mircea, State Secretary and Mr. Zekeriya Şarbak Deputy Undersecretary. Ambassador Radivoj Cvetičanin also participated in the Meeting.

The participation in the Meeting by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia Dr. Ivo Sanader, the Prime Minister of Romania, Mr. Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, the Vice-President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs, Mr. Franco Frattini and Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact Dr. Erhard Busek was most valuable.

The special invitees: Mr. Miraš Radović, Minister of Justice; Mr. Jusuf Kalamperović, Minister of the Interior; Mr. Peter Altmaier, State Secretary, German EU Presidency; Ms. Anna Myriam Roccattello, Head of Division, UNMIK; Ambassador Jose Fuentes Monzonis-Vilallonga of Spain, Head of the OSCE Mission; Ms. J. Margaret Killerby,

Head of Department, Council of Europe; Mr. Michael Kennedy, President of the College of Eurojust; Mr. Mitja Močnik, Director of the SECI Center; Mr. Sorin Sterie, SPAI RSLO; Prof. Spyridon Flogaitis, Director of the European Public Law Center, Mr. Zorislav Antun Petrović, Chairman of Board of Directors, Transparency International Croatia; Mr. Yuri Afanasiev, Ordinary Representative, UNDP and Ms. Sanja Mađarević Šujster, World Bank also participated in the Meeting.

At the Meeting we paid particular attention to the process of implementation of EU standards in the Justice and Home Affairs area in the SEECP Participating States, through strengthening of the rule of law, judiciary reform processes and fight against corruption. We confirmed our full commitment to achieving EU standards in this area in cooperation with corresponding European Institutions.

We emphasised the importance of these issues as key elements of the EU perspective for South Eastern Europe. We agreed that the perspective of EU membership is the best incentive for institutional and legislative reforms in the area of Justice and Home Affairs.

Not only is the implementation of EU standards in the area of Justice and Home Affairs a precondition for EU membership, but it will also give immediate benefits to our citizens and our economies by creating a stable environment for investment and development. The SEECP participating states that are already EU members will play a supportive role for accomplishing commitments agreed upon during Greek Chairmanship in the JHA area.

With the help and support of Vice President Frattini we shall organise a conference on EU Justice and Home Affairs Strategy for South Eastern Europe in order to define long term goals and policies and to address other related issues. The conference should provide a setting for dialogue with the EU institutions on the way to support the South East European countries in the implementation of EU standards.

The comprehensive rule of law is a *sine qua non* of stable development of our nations. We are therefore committed to further development of our national legal systems, strengthening of institutions and the creation of stable, democratic societies, together and with the help of our EU partners. We decided to recommend to our governments to create special educational programmes aimed at increasing the awareness of younger generations of the importance of the rule of law and EU standards in this area.

Efficient and independent judiciary, able to deal with complex cases ranging from cross national crime to human rights issues is essential in order to meet the criteria of European integration. This is why we share a common understanding that the reform of the judiciary is one of the absolute priorities for our countries. We have decided to intensify our cooperation and the exchange of experience in the area of judicial reform. Therefore, EU support in the form of guidance and expertise as well as financial assistance through programmes like IPA is most welcomed by our countries.

Special attention was given to the fight against corruption and our cooperation in dealing with this problem which burdens our societies, undermines our development and hinders our main goal to expand the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice to South Eastern Europe. Consistent fight against corruption is part of our EU obligations. We agreed to intensify the cooperation between responsible authorities of our countries, while at the same time we welcomed the results achieved in the implementation of individual strategies and policies in this area.

We called upon EU institutions to accelerate the ongoing discussions on the liberalisation of the visa regime for the countries of South Eastern Europe as a confirmation of their progress and as an important incentive for future reform. Furthermore, we stressed the importance of conclusion and proper implementation of readmission agreements, both with the EU and between our countries as well as the harmonisation of our visa regimes with EU standards.

In line with the draft Framework Decision of the Council of the European Union, we expressed our support to the proposal that has been already submitted in the framework of the Council of Europe's procedures for the facilitation of the transfer of sentenced persons to their country of origin and we will strive to reach a common final decision on this important proposal.

Aware of the fact that our countries lie on a very important organised crime route to the European Union, we agreed that it is necessary to invest maximum efforts in the protection of our borders. The gradual alignment with the Schengen acquis is the natural step forward in this process. We are determined to develop and implement, in cooperation with the EU institution, our own respective action plans for the application of Schengen standards on our borders.

The judicial and police cooperation are crucial in the efficient fight against cross border crime. The threat of organised crime in the region can be removed only by close and efficient cooperation of the responsible authorities on the basis of a harmonized system of data protection which would enable a free flow of information. We are equally committed to closer cooperation of our countries with specialised EU agencies such as, Eurojust, Europol and Frontex through signing of cooperation treaties and designation of National Contact Points.

We reviewed the role of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe in the area of Justice and Home Affairs, especially in the light of the conclusion of its mandate and the future enhanced regional ownership of the main segments of cooperation in South Eastern Europe by the SEECP through the work of the RCC. We confirmed that JHA has always held an essential place in the Stability Pact agenda and we agreed that the work on issues of organised crime, terrorism, fight against corruption, migration, asylum, refugee return and police cooperation, cross border security and cooperation should continue. Owing to the Stability Pact, the process of strengthening EU standards in this part of Europe and the progress of our countries towards EU membership was accelerated. We expressed strong conviction that the RCC will continue to be equally efficient in helping to

strengthen our cooperation in these important areas and bring our countries closer to EU membership. We found that in the process of the Stability Pact transformation and setting up of the RCC it will be necessary to streamline all regional JHA related initiatives in order to ensure efficiency and transparency.

In this regard, we appraised with satisfaction the activities organised and undertaken in the framework of Initiative against Organised Crime (SPOC), Anti-corruption Initiative (SPAI) and Police Forum Initiative (PFI), serving as a platform for bringing together experts and representatives from SEE with international partners, sharing interest and responsibility for the fight against cross-border organised crime and high-level corruption, as well as for the capacity building of police services in order to reach these aims. We especially welcomed the Memorandum of Understanding on fighting corruption through Anticorruption initiative for SEE, signed today on the margins of this Meeting.

We called on the Chiefs of Police to strengthen their efforts in coordinating regional law enforcement cooperation.

We welcomed the results of the 4th Regional Conference on Stolen Vehicle Crime in SEE held in Bled, Slovenia and supported its recommendations, especially those concerning intensified cooperation within the SEE region and with European and international partners such as EUROPOL and INTERPOL.

We appraised with satisfaction the activities of the SECI Centre in Bucharest which provides a setting for regional police cooperation, focusing on capacity building and training, joint regional operations and facilitating bilateral cooperation. At the same time we reaffirmed our commitment to reform the SECI Centre and we welcomed the role of the EU and EUROPOL in assisting the Centre to become a strong international law enforcement partner

We welcomed the work and achievements of the MARRI Initiative and its Regional Centre in Skopje which has taken shape and is now fully functional. At the same time, we recognized the need for further cooperation amongst our countries and with our European partners to improve our migration management systems and combat illegal migration. We will make further efforts to develop the Initiative and its Regional Centre into a platform for regional dialogue and a centre of excellence and capacity building for cooperation on migration management along European standards.

We finally welcomed the forthcoming Croatian presidency of the Initiative.

We agreed that the SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office would brief the EU JHA Council on the conclusions of this Meeting.