



Working Table III Meeting
Sofia, 17 May 2005

Final WT III Chair's remarks

Security Sector Reform in SEE has to be seen in the context of the integration of the countries of the region into the European and Euro- Atlantic structures. Defence conversion is part of Security Sector Reform, but it is at the same time a crucial dimension of much wider transformation processes. Defence conversion addresses the question how to make the best possible use of the human and material potential which has become redundant for defence purposes for socio-economic development, and, consequently, defence conversion is an important issue for all involved in reconstruction and socio-economic development in SEE.

Participants took note of the results of the SEECP MoD's meeting on 31 March in Bucharest, in particular of the commitment of the participating countries to enhance cooperation and dialogue in SEE and also with international partners on specific defence conversion related processes. They expressed their support to strengthen the role of RACVIAC as a regional centre for defence conversion, without diminishing RACVIAC's role regarding the other issues in its mandate. They supported the establishment of three Working Groups covering the main components of defence conversion, i.e.: retraining of redundant military personnel; conversion of military bases and facilities and restructuring/downsizing of military industries as well as the reorientation of military research and development. They asked the RACVIAC member states and international partners to consider taking the necessary actions and to provide support towards bringing about such an enhanced role for RACVIAC as a regional defence conversion centre.

They expressed appreciation for the role of NATO, as well as other international partners, bilateral donors and some international financial institutions, which are active in the field of defence conversion in SEE.

Participants also called for increased regional cooperation on destruction of redundant stockpiles of major conventional weapon systems, including Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and stock of redundant or expired ammunition/explosives, while taking into account environmental implications. The South Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) possesses relevant knowledge and expertise in the field of combating the threat of uncontrolled and excess SALW in the SEE region.

The participants noted that the ambitious agenda set by Serbia and Montenegro for the coming year for the MARRI Initiative raises expectations for increased regional cooperation. With the countries actively pursuing close collaboration on a range of issues, free movement of their citizens within the region can become a reality in the near future. Closer consular cooperation, regulating labour migration and a common approach on removing unnecessary impediments for citizens to obtain visa are feasible near term objectives. Finding sustainable solutions for the refugee and displacement questions remains a high priority and the commitments under the Sarajevo Declaration need to be followed up. The MARRI Access to Rights project has the potential of being an important instrument in this process and at the same time should pave the way towards bringing legislation and practical policies up to the level of the acquis communautaire.

The participants also noted the need expressed by the countries and the partners of the Ohrid Border Process to address the question of the future of the process, the first step in this respect being the upcoming Intermediate review meeting and the Brainstorming meeting on 31 May - 1 June in Vienna. The participants took note of the need for further progress in the implementation of the commitments taken by the countries. Progress already achieved so far was acknowledged during the JHA Ministerial meeting between the EU and the Western Balkan countries on 2 December 2004. At that occasion the Ohrid process was recognised as a “ a model for successful regional cooperation.

The participants noted that a decision on the transfer of the DPPI Secretariat to a location in SEE was being prepared and that a new Executive Secretary would be recruited soon to work from this regional office. Financial support for DPPI by bilateral donors had been crucial in the past few years. A continued need for external support for DPPI could be expected, including from new partners, such as the European Commission. But participants also recognised that with the transfer of DPPI to full regional ownership funding and expertise needed for DPPI should increasingly come from the region itself. DPPI partners are expected to establish a working group to develop proposals for measures needed to accomplish a full transfer to regional ownership.

Thank you