

GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

MINISTRY OF INTERIOR



MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

REGIONAL MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE MINISTERS of INTERIOR and JUSTICE



Facing the Challenges of Organized and Serious Crimes in the Western Balkans

“Strengthening Regional and Transnational Co-operation as a Prerequisite for Successful Criminal Proceedings”

**Belgrade, Serbia
September 27-29, 2009**

JOINT STATEMENT

- i. **Recalling** the Charter on Good Neighbourly Relations, Stability, Security and Cooperation in South Eastern Europe of 12 February 2000;
- ii. **Recalling** the EU – Western Balkans Summit of Thessaloniki and the Thessaloniki agenda set out on 21 June 2003, as well as the EU – Western Balkan Forum of 28 November 2003 according to that the fight against organized crime and corruption has been defined as a matter of utmost priority;
- iii. **Recalling** the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Convention) and its Protocols, as well as the London Statement on Defeating Organized Crime in South Eastern Europe of 25 November 2002;
- iv. **Recalling** the Police Cooperation Convention for South East Europe, signed on 5 May 2006 in Vienna;
- v. **Determined** to fight organized crime and serious crimes by enhancing regional cooperation at the political and operational level, between judicial authorities, and between law enforcement agencies, such as are the aims of ILECU Project;

I. Ministers responsible for Justice and Home Affairs and State Prosecutors of the Western Balkans countries (The Participants), together with the representatives from Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland, met in Belgrade on 28 and 29 September 2009, in the presence of the Vice-President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security of the European Commission, as special guest, to discuss challenges that countries in the Western Balkans face in fighting transnational organized crime and other serious crimes and ways of strengthening their regional cooperation, as one of the prerequisites towards European integrations.

The Participants agreed on the following measures to be taken at the national level in order to strengthen efforts to combat transnational organized crime and other serious crimes, as obstacle to stable democracy, sound and accountable institutions, rule of law and economic development in the Western Balkans:

- a) to promote the effective functioning and mutual cooperation of the national agencies involved in combating organized crime;
- b) to complete the legislative steps for implementing the Palermo Convention and its Protocols, and to strengthen law enforcement agencies where needed;
- c) to take further steps for confiscating the proceeds of crime, including financial assets of criminal organizations involved in organized crime;
- d) to strengthen cooperation with EUROJUST and EUROPOL through conclusion of agreements and by strongly encouraging the adoption of national legislation in conformity with European Union and Council of Europe norms and standards, in full respect of data protection rules;
- e) to monitor progress and to identify obstacles in fighting organized crime;
- f) to provide appropriate assistance to victims of trafficking in human beings and other forms of organized crime and to provide protection to witnesses, also to encourage them to give testimonies in trials against members of organized criminal groups;
- g) the law enforcement agencies personnel as well as the personnel of the competent judicial authorities should be well trained on matters of organized crime and be informed of the negative consequences of such actions to societies;

II. The Participants agreed on the following measures at regional level to intensify cooperation to combat organized crime and other serious crimes in Western Balkan countries:

- a) to identify and fight all links to criminal activities, such as organized crime;
- b) to make better use of the existing mechanisms to prevent and combat organized crime, such as: SECI Regional Centre for Combating Trans-border Crime (SECI Centre), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the relevant initiatives of

Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Southeast Europe Police Chiefs Association (SEPCA), South Eastern European Prosecutors Advisory Group (SEEPAG), Support to Prosecutors' Network in South-Eastern Europe (PROSECO regional Project) and to facilitate their cooperation through the exchange of views, best practices and updated information on organized crime in South Eastern Europe;

c) to enhance regional cooperation to fight organized crime within the fora provided by the above mentioned regional organizations and initiatives, and by inviting these mechanisms to increase their efforts to achieve tangible results in compliance with European standards;

d) to strengthen direct cooperation between State Prosecutors Offices, other judicial authorities and law enforcement agencies, based on concluded memoranda of understanding;

e) to use efficiently all the forms and methods of cooperation provided for by the Police Cooperation Convention for South East Europe by signing and implementing bilateral and multilateral protocols;

f) to facilitate mutual legal assistance and judicial cooperation by signing, ratifying and implementing the Council of Europe Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters and its Protocols and by concluding the necessary bilateral agreements with their neighbours;

g) to facilitate extradition by signing, ratifying and implementing the European Convention on Extradition and its Protocols and by concluding the necessary bilateral agreements with their neighbours;

h) to support more pro-active, joint investigations to counter organized crime networks, including the ones engaged in trafficking in human beings across and within countries of origin, transit and destination, and to prevent illegal migration;

i) to inform civil society on policies and measures taken to fight organized crime in South Eastern Europe and to seek public support for such policies;

j) to discuss on progress achieved in the framework of this campaign at the next meetings.

Belgrade

29 September 2009