



SECI

Regional Center
For Combating
Transborder Crime

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of abbreviations	p. 4
Director`s Foreword:	p. 5
1. Introduction	p. 7
2. Operational activity	p. 9
3. Trainings/seminars	p.23
4. Public Affairs	p.24
5. International Cooperation	p.25
6. Stategic partners	p.28
7. SECI Center contact information	p.30

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASF	Automated Search Facility
ATTF	Anti-Terrorism Task Force
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
CRBN	Chemical, Radiological, Biological and Nuclear
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
Europol	European Police Office
ICMPD	International Center for Migration Policy Development
ICPO	International Criminal Police Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
CEI	Central European Initiative
FCTF	Financial Crime Task Force
JCC	Joint Cooperation Committee
JHA	Justice and Home Affairs
NFP	National Focal Point
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSD	Operational Support Department
RACVIAC	Regional Arms Control and Verification Information and Assistance Center
SAP	Stabilization and Association Process
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SECI	Southeast European Cooperative Initiative
SECI Agreement	Agreement on Cooperation to Prevent and Combat Transborder Crime
SECI Center	SECI Regional Center for Combating Transborder Crime
SEE	South East Europe
SEECF	South East European Cooperation Process
SEEPAG	South East European Prosecutors Advisory Group
SEESAC	South Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons
SPOC	Stability Pact Initiative against Organized Crime
TF	Task Force
THB	Trafficking in Human Beings
UNICRI	United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNMIK	United Nations Mission to Kosovo
USSS	United States Secret Service
WCO	World Customs Organization
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

2005 witnessed a significant milestone in the history of the SECI Regional Center for Combating Transborder Crime, as its strategic priorities for the next five years started being implemented.

Our Strategy for 2005-2010 places at the top of its agenda our commitment to intensify cooperation on the issues of Justice and Home Affairs, in close co-ordination with each other.

Common interpretations of the nature of criminal activity in South-eastern Europe invariably include corruption, fraud, money laundering, drug and small-arms trafficking, counterfeit goods and monetary instruments, vehicle theft, violence, smuggling and trafficking of people.

No single European state has a monopoly on crime control problems or on abuses of its border management systems. Any examination across states will show that the problems are shared - that is, large numbers of people looking to improve their lives or to practice their criminal or terrorist activities in Europe or, via Europe, in North America, using any means available to them to achieve these by breaching or avoiding national controls.

No single European state can, therefore, realistically ever solve these huge and common problems by its own efforts; nor is there any unique method already available from any one of our respective law enforcement experiences which can offer the model by itself.

In this context, the SECI Regional Center for Combating Transborder Crime proves to be a Success Story, which realizes the links and connection between the national law enforcement authorities of police and customs and other key actors in the fight against transnational crime.

The multitude of achievements after six years of activity is the result of hard work and dedication of the police and customs liaison officers. Among those achievements, I would like to draw the attention to the way in which the SECI Center targeted, with increasing effects, the types of operational priorities in co-operation with its law enforcement partners.

The SECI Center's performance targets are realistic and not only an assembly of statistics to show that the institution is active. I am encouraged by the way in which the SECI Center, as a whole, is maturing and delivering results.

Due to the sensitive nature of law enforcement work in the field of cross-border crime, SECI Center's contribution cannot be readily apparent to the general public. Nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged that SECI Center has contributed to better police and customs co-operation within Southeast Europe a region that is striving to become an area of freedom, security and justice. Moreover, the past year's experience proved that SECI Center is able to provide critical support to law enforcement authorities in their fight against transnational crime.



DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

The Center will remain a regional law enforcement Center in the future, and our aim is to increase and to upgrade the SECI Center's operational capabilities, as well as adopting a new legal framework which will be in compliance with EU standards.

In accordance with the EU strategy towards the Western Balkans region, in a relatively short period of time the SECI Center is expected to become a regional operational center for those neighboring third states to the EU that have candidate country status or are in the Stabilization and Association Process. So, we need to be fully prepared to meet the challenges faced by the countries in this part of Europe.

Mitja Močnik
Director

Signature



INTRODUCTION

The SECI Regional Center supports joint trans-border crime fighting efforts of the SECI participating countries, in order to contribute to the overall security and political stabilization in the region.

In order to achieve this objective, the enhancement of coordinated efforts between law enforcement agencies and judicial authorities within the individual participating states is also required.

The SECI Center has 12 Member States: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Slovenia, Serbia and Montenegro, and Turkey. On 26 of May, 1999, these countries signed the Agreement on Cooperation to Prevent and Combat Trans-border Crime (SECI Agreement). 26 of May is the Anniversary Day of the SECI Center.



The SECI Center Member States

As the criminal networks from Eastern Europe are operating beyond the region, other states joined the SECI Center as Observer States. Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Georgia, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States of America are closely cooperating with the SECI Center.

In accordance with the SECI Agreement the ICPO-Interpol and World Customs Organization have Permanent Advisor status.

The permanent participation of ICPO - INTERPOL and World Customs Organization (WCO) in the activity and the development of the policy of the SECI Center ensures continuous coordination in order to avoid duplication of efforts.

Furthermore, taking into account the global aspects of trans-border crime, cooperation with countries outside the region and with international organizations is critical. In this respect, the SECI Center is a catalyst for efficient working relationships in making such cooperation possible. Therefore, other International Organizations and Bodies are reliable partners of the Center, such as:

INTRODUCTION

United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo, International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Center for Migration Policy and Development (ICMPD), Southeast Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), Central European Initiative (CEI), and the Special Coordinator Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, regarding the initiative to fight organized crime (SPOC).

There are 35 common borders administered by the 12 member countries with a total population of around 145 million people. They are confronting the same type of social and economic problems and they share the same characteristic problems associated with the presence of organized crime.

The decision-making body of the SECI Center is the Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC). It consists of two national members representing the Ministry of Interior and the Customs Authority from the 12 signatory states. Each of the Member Countries has one vote in the decision making process.



The 20th JCC meeting was held in Bucharest in March, 2005

The management of the SECI Center is elected for a period of 2 years by the Joint Cooperation Committee and it comprises a Director, a Deputy Director/Head of Operational Support Department and a Head of the Legal and Internal Department.



The management of the SECI Center

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY

The core of the SECI Center operational activity is performed by the Liaison Officers. They are seconded by the SECI Center Member Countries and work together in the Headquarters. They represent their national police and customs authorities and ensure a permanent information exchange.

Working methods

There are two operational methods at the SECI Center, which complement and support each other: the Information Exchange and the Task Force.

Information Exchange

The Information Exchange is done through the Liaison Officers. The SECI Center information exchange network is composed of 24 police and customs liaison officers, supported by 12 National Focal Points set up in the Member States.

Due to the SECI Center's secure and fast communications system (an encrypted virtual private network over internet, voice and fax communications systems provided with the most advanced encryption facilities; and data communications systems compatible with the Interpol's 24/7 network), the information exchange is very reliable and it is done in a confidential environment. Thus, over 6,400 operational messages were circulated through the SECI Center's communications network in 2005.

This heavy and regular information exchange through the SECI Center has led to the development of important investigative cases, arrests, and prosecutions.

For example, following the request and information provided by the Moldavian Police authorities through the SECI Center, the Turkish National Police organized two operations in Istanbul. The first operation took place in January 2005 and resulted in the arrest of one trafficker and the rescue of 7 victims of Moldavian and Ukrainian origin. The second operation was implemented in April 2005 and led to the arrest of two traffickers and the rescue of 37 victims of Moldavian, Ukrainian, Russian nationalities.

In August 2005, the Romanian Border Police stopped a Nissan vehicle which was suspected to be stolen, on the border between Romania and Ukraine. Following the request through the SECI Center, in only several hours the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina provided relevant information that the driver was using forged documents. Based on that information the Romanian Police could detain and investigate the suspect person.

Also in August 2005, the Romanian Police informed the Hungarian Police through the SECI Center about a criminal group running an illegal printing workshop in Hungarian territory, where coins of 2 Euro were being counterfeited. Based on this information and as a result of the joint investigation carried out, a Romanian and a Hungarian citizen were arrested in October 2005.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY

Among other illicit products which were used to produce the counterfeit coins, the coining press and 2645 pieces of 2 Euro coins ready to be put into circulation were seized.

In December 2005, following the identification of the perpetrator of a triple murder in Bucharest by the Romanian Police, an urgent request for detection of the suspect was sent to the Bulgarian and Serbian authorities through the SECI Center. After only a few hours, due to the excellent SECI Center police cooperation mechanism providing for fast information exchanges among Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia and Montenegro, the suspect person was captured by the Serbian Police near Belgrade, arrested and then returned to Romania.

Task Forces

The second form of cooperation provided in the SECI Center framework is the Task Force. The concept of "Task Force" is an important and efficient tool, as it focuses on joint operations. Its members, who are law enforcement officers from either the police and/or customs administration of the Member Countries, work together and exchange information on the specific topic of the respective Task Force.

A Task Force is coordinated by the country that assumed responsibility for it. Thus, the Center has Task Forces operating in such areas as: Anti-Drug, Trafficking in Human Beings and Migrant Smuggling, Financial and Computer Crime, Anti-Fraud and Anti-Smuggling, Stolen Vehicles, Container Security and Anti-Terrorism. Regional operations, coordinated investigations, strategic analysis projects and trainings can be developed within each Task Force.

For example, in only four years, between 2002 and 2005, 21 region-wide operations were undertaken by the Task Forces and implemented with SECI Center coordination, as follows:

- 7 drug interdiction operations
- 3 operations against trafficking in human beings
- 5 operations against stolen vehicles
- 3 anti-smuggling operations targeting cigarettes and petroleum products
- 2 operations on small arms and light weapons
- 1 operation on counterfeit currency

Main Activities in 2005

SECI Centers' management, Liaison Officers and staff, as well as Member Countries' representatives participated in numerous international operational activities in the region during 2005. The vast majority of these activities were Task Force meetings (attended by the national experts from the countries), operative missions to transport witnesses from one country to another country for the purpose of court testimony, as well as various international meetings attended by the Task Force Project Managers.

The Task Force on Trafficking in Human Beings and Migrant Smuggling

The THB Task Force was established in 2000 and is coordinated by the initiating country, Romania. It is actively cooperating with U.S. agencies, such as: Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Homeland Security, as well as international organizations and institutions: the International Organization for Migration, the International Center for Migration Policy Development, Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe, INTERPOL and EUROPOL. This Task Force focuses on coordinating regional efforts aimed at identifying the criminal groups that are dealing with trafficking in human beings, conducting common investigations against those groups and identifying trafficked persons, as well as taking efficient measures for their repatriation.

Throughout this time, the THB Task Force has been remarkably successful and has consistently extended its cooperation network.

Regional Action Plans were developed during 2002 - 2004 for the region to implement Operation Mirage. During these operations, which were intended to be the largest operations ever executed in the South-eastern Europe, the police forces acted as a single body, implementing raids and controls in public places (night bars, hotels, discos) in all the participating countries.

Major activities in 2005

During 2005, the SECI Center continued to successfully impact the international police cooperation environment in Southeast Europe and supported the national efforts to combat trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling. As agreed by the participants at the 11th SECI Center THB Task Force Meeting, held in Poiana Brasov (Romania) during September 20-24, 2004, a new concept of operation in the field of trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling was implemented during 2005 to improve the anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling efforts in the region. The new type of action was focused on developing particular cases coordinated through the SECI Center and regional analysis projects.

The national representatives (police, border police and prosecutors) participating at the 12th Mirage Task Force Meeting held in September 2005 in Bucharest, evaluated the results of the new operational concept and reinforced the decision to continue working on specific cases and develop strategic analysis. It was decided that regional reports on human trafficking and migrant smuggling in SEE be released every six months, based on national reporting.

According to the first SECI Center Report on Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling in SEE, 735 victims of human trafficking were assisted and 165 repatriated out of the total 2,380 victims who were identified in the region during the first six months of 2005. Also 1,392 persons were charged out of the total 1,772 traffickers identified by the police authorities. The same report revealed that 67,921 illegal migrants were detected on the territories of the SECI member countries, and 878 migrant smugglers were charged out of the total 1,735 who were identified by the national authorities.

The Task Force on Trafficking in Human Beings and Migrant Smuggling

Regional Operations / Coordinated Investigations

The information exchange in the area of human trafficking and migrant smuggling increased from 268 requests and information during 2004 to 371 during 2005. Also increasing was the number of coordinated investigations supported by the SECI Center.

Following a request of Police of Serbia and Montenegro, the SECI Center supported the organization of a working meeting on 19.05.2005 in Brcko, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The investigators exchanged all available information about one THB case with connections in both countries. As a result of this coordinated investigation 2 victims (citizens of Serbia and Montenegro) were identified, 8 traffickers were arrested in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 1 trafficker was arrested in Serbia and Montenegro.

Following information provided by the Romanian Police through the SECI Center in January 2005, the Bulgarian National Service for Combating Organized Crime started an investigation on an organized criminal group involved in THB activities (recruitment in Romania, transportation to Bulgaria and control for the purpose of sexual exploitation in Bulgaria). This coordinated investigation led to the rescue of 3 victims and further the arrest and prosecution of one Romanian and one Bulgarian citizen in Bulgaria. Finally, these two persons were convicted and sentenced, respectively, to 5 and 3 years imprisonment. 3 Romanian citizens were separately charged for THB crimes (recruitment) in Romania.

Following a request of the police authorities from Ukraine, two operational meetings were held during 2005 at the SECI Center premises in Bucharest with the participation of Ukrainian, Bulgarian and Greek officials. As a result of the Operation Odessa was started to dismantle an international THB network operating in Ukraine, Bulgaria and Greece. Subsequently two Ukrainian prosecutors met their Bulgarian counterparts in Sofia with the SECI Center support. As a result of these meetings, important evidence was secured and the head of this trafficking network was arrested in Ukraine.

In another case which was supported by the SECI Center, a joint investigation was started among Romania, Hungary and Austria to dismantle an international illegal migrant smuggling network (Operation Nistru). Several meetings were held in Bucharest with the participation of police officers from the three states. As a result, targeting operations were planned and simultaneously executed in three countries (Austria, Hungary and Romania), ending in many arrests in all territories: 5 persons were arrested in Romania, 8 in Hungary and 52 in Austria.

In addition to the above-mentioned results, 12 Romanian traffickers were arrested and 46 victims were identified by Romania as a result of three separate investigations coordinated during 2005 between Romania and the SECI observer countries such as Austria, Italy and Germany with SECI Center support.

Also, 5 coordination meetings were held during 2005 between the Slovenian police representatives and the Ukrainian officials in two separate THB cases, and 2 meetings between the Slovenian and Romanian officials in the case Fisherman (targeting also THB).

The Task Force on Trafficking in Human Beings and Migrant Smuggling

Operation Traveler (migrant smuggling from Turkey to Western Europe through the Southeast Europe) continued to be coordinated by the SECI Center with six SECI member countries.

The success of these operations was possible because prosecutors were always invited to attend the coordination meetings from the very beginning. Only when they considered that the investigations were complete and there was sufficient evidence, simultaneous arrests of the traffickers were authorized in the participating countries.



The SECI Center continued its special witness program in support of the regional judicial process. Most of the victims showed confidence in this program and this led to 17 victims of human trafficking accepting to testify against their traffickers in various courts in the region during 2005 as follows:

- 11 victims from Moldova (10 in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and one in Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- 4 victims from Romania (1 in Serbia and Montenegro and 3 in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)
- 1 victim from Bulgaria (in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)
- 1 victim from Kosovo (in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

Significantly, for the first time in the judicial history of Southeast Europe, one witness testified by a video-conference system from Moldova for a court in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. This was made possible through the technical support provided by the FBI through the SECI Center.

A large number of young women from SEE were trafficked to Japan (over 5000 visas granted by Japan in 2005), being lured with job promises such as dancer, waiter, baby-sitter etc. and forced into practicing prostitution. This is why a governmental delegation from Japan, composed of representatives of the Prime Minister Cabinet, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Labour, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Justice and the National Police Agency visited the SECI Center in July 2005, in order to solicit support for fighting trafficking in human beings.

The Anti-Drug Task Force

The coordinator of the Anti-Drug Task Force is Bulgaria. This TF was established in 2000 and it works in close cooperation with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and with other related agencies.

The main goal of this Task Force is to focus on impeding trafficking in drugs bound for Europe, along the various branches of the Balkan Routes and the Silk Route, as well as to enhance the existing regional counter-drug collaboration.

The activity of the Anti-Drug Task Force has changed dramatically after the decisions made at the West Asian Heroin Conference held in Ankara in 2002, when the SECI Center, through its Anti-Drug Task Force, was requested to take the lead in a region-wide interdiction initiative, code-named Containment. Thus the SECI Center acted as an Operations Center and a Communications Platform. Regional interdiction operations were carried out in the region in the period 2002-2005, targeting separately trucks, buses, trains or airports.



The Center is also gathering post-seizure information from the member countries and releases a Southeast Europe Drug Seizure Report every 6 months. These reports depict the latest trends in drug trafficking in the region, and can be used for both strategic and operational decisions by the national anti-drug agencies.

Main activities in 2005

The 9th Anti-Drug Task Force Meeting was held on April 25-26 in Varna (Bulgaria), with the participation of 62 experts from all SECI Member Countries and also from the Observer Countries and international organizations. It was decided during this meeting that the SECI Regional Center would coordinate the fourth Operation Containment, code-named Harmony, to interdict drug transiting through the region. The operation was implemented in two phases, to target TIR trucks in June, respectively maritime containers in September 2005.

It was also decided during this meeting that strategic analysis reports on drug trafficking in South East Europe will continue to be delivered every six months by the Center based on national reporting of drug seizures.

The Anti-Drug Task Force

Regional Operations

During June 23-29, and September 1-10, 2005, the SECI Regional Center coordinated the fourth containment operation, known as the Operation Harmony. During a period of sixteen days, law enforcement authorities in Southeastern Europe implemented special operational plans and intensified the information exchange through the SECI Center, with the single aim of targeting drug trafficking by TIR trucks and maritime freight containers throughout the region.

The Police and Customs authorities from the SECI member states, supported by the DEA, as well as Austria, Azerbaijan, Germany, Georgia, and Ukraine initiated close to 200 information requests and exchanged over 700 messages pertaining to drug trafficking.

Over 200 kilograms of narcotics were seized in the Southeast European countries during Operation Harmony: 91.418 kilograms of heroin in Hungary, 83.160 kilograms of heroin in Greece, 20.975 kilograms of heroin in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and 10.005 kilograms of marihuana in Bulgaria. Also, 23 persons were arrested for drug trafficking all over the region.

According to the findings of two SECI Center Reports on Southeast European Drug Trafficking which were released by the SECI Center during 2005, a total quantity of 38 tons of drugs (38,344 kilograms, to include heroin, cocaine, cannabis and amphetamines) and 3,289,139 tabs of synthetic drugs were seized in the whole SECI region over the past year. The report also shows that a total number of 5,502 persons were investigated in the region for drug trafficking.

During 2005, the SECI Center continued to successfully impact on the international police cooperation and supported the national efforts to combat drug trafficking. For example, following the seizure of 39 kilograms of heroin by the police authorities from Bosnia and Herzegovina in January 2005, a coordinated investigation was started on a drug trafficking network transporting heroin from Turkey to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Two operational meetings were held in Istanbul and Sarajevo, between anti-drug police investigators and prosecutors from the two countries, with the support of the SECI Center. As a result, five persons (one of them being the main organizer of the heroin smuggling scheme) were arrested in Istanbul in November 2005, and 23 kilograms of hashish and two vehicles were seized. The police authorities of Bulgaria and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were also involved later in this successful investigation.

The Task Force on Financial and Computer Crimes

Financial and computer crimes are some of the most sophisticated and advanced criminal phenomena. The current trend in financial crime is for criminals to exploit HI Tech for illegal purposes, thus causing significant damage not just to individuals, but also to businesses and institutions around the world.

In order to develop the most effective law enforcement cooperation, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia initiated the establishment of a Financial and Computer Crime Task Force, which is supported by the US Secret Service, the US Department of Justice, the Italian Guardia di Finanza, as well as representatives of the payment card industry (Visa-Master Card), Interpol and Europol. This TF aims at exchanging information on counterfeit currency and payment cards, money laundering cases, computer crimes and training of law enforcement officials in the region on these issues.



Main activities in 2005

In June, 2005, the SECI Center, with the support of the United States Government, the Italian Guardia di Finanza, Visa Card International, American Express, the Romanian Fraud Forum (a private conglomeration of banks, the credit card industry, and government agencies), and the United States Secret Service, hosted a two day training on payment card frauds. This meeting was the first major training under the umbrella of the SECI Center's Financial and Computer Crimes Task Force, and brought together financial investigators from most of the SECI Member Countries. This was the first such regional meeting of its type, and marks an important step forward in regional cooperation on financial crime matters.

However, the most important aspect of the meeting was not training, but networking. The relevant financial investigators of many SECI Member Countries have now met each other personally for the first time, discussed issues related to regional crimes, and committed to work together in the future with SECI Center assistance and coordination. Perhaps most importantly, as a direct result of this meeting, the SECI Center has developed a very significant case involving organized crime.

The Task Force on Financial and Computer Crimes

In December, 2005, in cooperation with the United States Secret Service and the Italian Guardia di Finanza, a one week training session on the "Investigation of Computers and Electronic Crimes" was organized at the premises of the SECI Center within the SECI Financial Fraud Task Force.

The training program focused on the investigation of cyber crimes. The goal of the course was to provide up-to-date training to law enforcement institutions that are dealing with cyber crime investigations.

The course was designed for police officers who were working on Computer and Electronic Crime Investigations, with little or no computer background experience, from the SECI member countries. This training provided the participants with knowledge that enabled them to act as a "first responder" in cyber crimes cases.

The Task Force on Stolen Vehicles

Many of the stolen vehicles smuggled out of the European Union are transported to the recipients on roads via Southeast European countries, and this is a real challenge for the law enforcement agencies.

That is why a specialized Task Force on Stolen Vehicles was established at the SECI Center. This Task Force is coordinated by Hungary. Its goals are to exchange information regarding national vehicle registration, to review the vehicle originality system in every SECI member state, and to increase the control over vehicle trade companies, by establishing a common database.

Operation Road-Show, conducted by the SECI Center during 2002-2005, aimed at the interdiction and seizure of stolen vehicles transiting SEE countries, deterrence and apprehension of traffickers. The secondary goal was to gather intelligence aimed at criminal enterprises which regularly use Southeast European routes to move the vehicles to the region and beyond.



In May, 2005 a stolen BMW X5 was recovered in a couple of hours following an effective information exchange between the Romanian and the Moldavian Liaison Officer at the SECI Center

Major activities in 2005

Operation Road Show 2005 was the third region-wide interdiction operation in Southeast Europe focused on stolen vehicles and coordinated by the SECI Center.

All twelve SECI Center member countries were engaged in the Operation Road Show 2005. The primary goal of the Operation Road Show III was to support the participating Southeast European countries against trafficking in stolen vehicles by providing an updated and accurate information sharing service in the region, alongside the Interpol's ASF system.

Overall there was a significant increase in the number of vehicles seized during Road Show 2005 (364), in comparison with Road Show 2004 (167).

A total number of 93 vehicles were seized after being smuggled internationally, and 80 had been stolen from the EU countries, mostly from Italy (36) and Germany (23). Mercedes, Volkswagen, Audi and BMW accounted for 54% of the total vehicles seized in the region during the Operation after being stolen from the EU countries.

The Anti-Smuggling and Anti-Fraud Task Force

The Anti-Fraud and Anti-Smuggling Task Force is jointly co-coordinated by Albania and Croatia. This Task Force is the result of a merger, at the beginning of June 2003, between two previously established Task Forces on customs-related crimes.

In June 2004, the SECI Center Task Force on Anti-Smuggling and Anti-Fraud approved the proposal of Hungarian Customs and Financial Guard to implement a regional operation focused on cigarettes smuggled via all forms of transportation (air, sea, rail, and road). The exercise was code-named Operation Shadow and principally aimed at exchanging information and producing a situation report on cigarette smuggling based on details of seizures made in SEE during the period September 20 December 20, 2004.

Main activities in 2005

The 2nd Anti-Smuggling and Anti-Fraud Task Force Meeting was held between 31 March - 1 April 2005 in Bucharest, with the participation of experts from the SECI member countries, World Customs Organization (RILO Western Europe) and tobacco industry. It was decided during this meeting that a preparatory meeting would be held in October 2005 and a regional operation on monitoring the movement of petroleum products throughout Southeast Europe, code-named Black Pearl would be implemented in November 2005. Also during this meeting, Operation Shadow was evaluated.

Operation Shadow was joined by all SECI member countries, plus Austria, Italy and UNMIK. The evaluation report was based on 472 seizure reports of the participating countries and it was done in order to cover the lack of a regional overview on cigarette smuggling in South-eastern Europe. It was intended to support the national anti-smuggling efforts by providing the policy makers and officials who are involved in the difficult task of combating cigarette smuggling with recently developed regional strategic information.

The regional information exchange on cigarette smuggling was boosted during Operation Shadow to a level never achieved before. After receiving the notification seizure, the SECI Center disseminated it to the countries connected to that seizure. Nevertheless, monitoring the follow-up investigations or cooperation developed by recipient countries was not the aim of Operation Shadow, so no measurement could be made.

According to the seizure data from the evaluation report, there is enormous cigarette smuggling activity in the region, involving transiting through many countries. Almost 150 tons of cigarettes were seized during the operation. It was revealed that huge quantities (over 3 million units) usually depart from China and Middle East, but also from regional countries such as Greece or Romania, and are destined for European Union countries. Their route includes mainly Turkey, Greece, Croatia and Romania. This type of smuggling in huge quantities is very well organized, uses commercial consignments and employs cover loads such as textiles, furniture and vegetables. Seaports were the location of the biggest seizures during Operation Shadow, with China as the primary departure country.

The Anti-Smuggling and Anti-Fraud Task Force

Operation Black Pearl

According to all statistical reports, the volume of trade in petrol and petrol products represents a very important part of commerce in our modern world. In addition, also referring to statistical reports, the revenues coming from this trade compose a large percentage of total state revenues.

Meanwhile, there is another characteristic of this commodity. Due to the thirst for energy and the multiple uses for petrol-related products, of use of its tens sub-products, doubtless this is one of the most smuggled commodities in the world, with a direct impact in Customs tax collection and revenues. Based on different sources, losses due to smuggling activity amount to several million dollars every year.



Picture provided by Photo French Customs / © F.Roche (by the courtesy of the WCO)

On 10 October 2005, the preparatory meeting of Operation Black Pearl (regional operation on monitoring the movement of petroleum products throughout South East Europe) was held in Bucharest, with the participation of the representatives of the SECI member countries, Belgium, Italy, United States, and WCO. The Regional Operational Plan was presented and technical details were discussed during this meeting.

Operation Black Pearl was developed by the SECI Center as an ambitious project to prevent smuggling of petrol and petrol products in South-eastern European region and to assist Customs Authorities increase their revenue collection.

Operation Black Pearl was implemented during 7-11 November 2005. According to the preliminary evaluation of this operation, 1,190 information were initiated by the SECI participating countries during the operational period. The operation led to 20 seizure cases, totalling 309,254 kilograms of various petroleum products seized.

Container Security Task Force



Containerized shipping is a major vulnerability all over the world over 200 million cargo containers move between major ports each year and containerized shipments represent today 90% of the world commerce. The challenge of container security is a considerable threat in the SECI region, as nine of the twelve Member States are located along the coasts and have active ports, which both ship and receive goods. Despite the growing threat worldwide, there has not been a targeted cross-border initiative to systematically collaborate in inspecting containers. The lack of cooperation in addressing this security issue could be exploited by organized crime groups and/or terrorist organizations.

The proposal to set up a Container Security Task Force, submitted by the Hellenic Ministry of Economy and Finances, was adopted during the 22nd JCC Meeting held in November 2005 in Bucharest.

This Task Force will be a structure that will provide specialized support in the area of container security. The support will include, but not be limited to, the process of identifying the challenge and threats of container security, while offering methods of improving security standards aiming to facilitate the trade in the region. Those methods will focus on risk analysis management, through a multi-agency cooperation.

The Anti-Terrorism Task Force (ATTF)

The Anti-Terrorism Task Force was established in February 2003, under the coordination of Turkey, by the approval of the Joint Cooperation Committee. It includes three sub-projects, namely:

- * Task Force on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW);
- * Task Force on Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD);
- * Task Force on Anti- Terrorism

Which are led by Albania, Romania and Turkey, respectively. The aim of this Task Force is to organize law enforcement activities and carry out regional coordination to prevent, detect, investigate and combat terrorism related crimes. The goals are to identify and analyze information on terrorist groups who participate in terrorist activities. Additionally, the Task Force will concentrate to discern the nexus between terrorism and organized crime groups dealing with drugs, human beings, SALW and WMD trafficking. By so doing, proactive initiatives will also be developed on financial resources and assets of terrorist networks in order to disable the financial resources of terrorist organizations.



Terrorist related crimes are highly challenging to investigate all over the world

One of the most important operations during the 2005 was coordinated by the SECI Center in a case of trafficking in weapons.

Thus following the request of a SECI member country, the SECI Center provided support for an undercover weapons purchase operation by an undercover agent. The purchase being successful, it was decided to continue the contact of the agent with the criminal group dealing with trafficking in weapons in order to collect more information. As a result of this undercover operation, information was gathered on the existence of several illegal weapons deposits on the territories of other neighboring SECI member countries. The operation led to the arrest of 17 persons, and the seizure of important amounts of weapons, ammunition, and even anti-tank missile launchers and detonation devices incorporated in mobile phones.

After the operation was ended, the SECI Center supported the inclusion of the undercover agent in a witness protection program and his relocation in another SECI member country.

TRAININGS/SEMINARS

It has become already a tradition that the SECI Center offers an excellent venue for law enforcement agencies and judicial representatives trainings, as it is endowed with modern equipments and includes a special training area for approximately 80 participants.



Over the year 2005, the Center hosted various specialized training courses, covering different domains of interest for police and customs officers from the Member Countries, such as:

- 22nd - 24th of March, meeting of the Legal Attaches of the USA Embassies in the South Eastern Europe;
- 6-10th of June - training on "Forging Documents" organized in collaboration with the Stability Pact for SEE and the Association of the European Police Colleges (AEPC);
- 20-21st of June - training organized within the Financial and Computer Crimes Task Force: "Investigation and Prevention of Payment Card Frauds";
- 23rd of June - Simulation Exercise STYX 2005, organized in the framework of the Black Sea Border Security Initiative (BSBSI), attended by participants from Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine;
- 5th of July - UNICRI evaluating meeting for the CBRN program, with the participation of representatives from SECI Center, UNICRI, EUROPOL;
- 2nd of August - meeting between the Stability Pact for SEE representatives and the SECI Center, on the common activities in the field of fighting trafficking in drugs and stolen vehicles;
- Preparatory meetings and investigative operations on matters related to drug trafficking, combating human beings and migrants smuggling trafficking, counterfeit currencies, forged documents, payment cards fraud, countering illicit trafficking in petroleum products and smuggling of cigarettes etc.

Three JCC meetings were held during 2005, as follows:

- 18th of March 20th JCC Meeting, Bucharest, SECI Center premises;
- 16th of September 2005, 21st Extraordinary Session of the Joint Cooperation Committee. Mr. Mitja Mocnik, Ministry Plenipotentiary with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia was elected Director of the SECI Center.
- 24-25th of November 2005, 22nd meeting of the Joint Cooperation Committee of the SECI Center, Bucharest, at the SECI Center's headquarters.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

In 2005, the SECI Center Public Affairs priority focus was directed on continuing creating awareness with a view to the growing capacity of the Center in coordinating cross-border efforts to fight transborder crime in the region.

The high level of interest received from political and law enforcement agencies visiting the SECI Center for information and cooperation issues is proof of the increased recognition of the added value of the SECI Center in South Eastern European anti-crime field. A significant number of NGOs and academic institutions representatives were hosted by the SECI Center and were briefed on the increasing activity conducted by the Center over the years.



Over 2005, the SECI Center received over 300 public information and media requests addressed by journalists from all over the Member Countries, as well as from the European Union Member Countries and from the United States of America. Broadcasted and printed interviews with representatives of the management or liaison officers were published in various media institutions in different countries.

News releases on the main events or operational activity were regularly posted, special information brochures were disseminated to investigators from the region in all the Member Countries languages, a new PR Strategy and promotional film were developed in order to create awareness on SECI Center`s performances.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

An increased number of high level visits took place in 2005, as the activity of the Center and its excellent operational results continued to draw more and more attention and interest from both Member Countries officials, as well as from other countries.

Thus, there were organized and facilitated visits to the SECI Center paid by high representatives from Member and Observer countries, such as: Mr. Michel Gaudin, General Director of the National Police of France; Mr. Tedo Zaparidze, BSEC Secretary General, Mrs. Caroline Flint, member of the British Parliament, Undersecretary of State, Mr. Kevin O'Connell, Deputy Director of EUROPOL, Mr. Johan Remkes, Dutch Minister of Interior, Mrs. Nancy Powell, Acting Assistant of the Secretary of State for International Relations and Law Enforcement, USA Department of State, Mrs. Ilinka Mitreva, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, General Georgios Angelakos, Head of the Greek Police, Mr. Marijan Mlinaric, Croatian Minister of Interior, Mr. Cristof Blocher, Minister of Justice and Interior of Switzerland, Mr. Basisa Colak, Minister of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina Federation, Mr. Yuri Lutenko, Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, Mr. Gokhan Aydinler, Head of the Turkish National Police, as well as by Ambassadors of the SECI Member or Observer Countries accredited in Romania and high level representatives of international organizations.

On 11th May, 2005, Heads of state and government and foreign affairs ministers from the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), as well as special invitees such as representatives of the EU Presidency, European Commission, NATO, United Nations, UNMIK, OSCE, Council of Europe visited the SECI Regional Center for Combating Trans-border Crime.

The eight SEECP summit organized in Bucharest, at the Parliament Palace, provided a good opportunity for the attendants to pay an informal visit to the SECI Center.

The participants expressed their intention to support increased and more effective cooperation between the SECI Center and the European Union's specialized institutions, as a way to sustain the SECI Center efforts against corruption and organized crime.

The speedy elaboration of an Action Plan, leading to drafting a new legal base for the functioning and future development of the Center also enjoys the support of the attendants to the SEECP summit, as stated in the final document adopted on May 11, 2005 the "Bucharest Declaration".

"We are thinking of ways to capitalize on the general need to build up an atmosphere of equal interest in the region in the issues of fight against organized crime and illegal trafficking in goods and persons", the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mihai Razvan Ungureanu told Rompres in an interview.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION



May 2005 Heads of States and Governments from the SEECP Countries visiting the SECI Center on May 11, 2005

The declaration of heads of state emphasized the common interest to take joint action against criminal networks. "It is a good opportunity all the more so as the Southeast European Cooperation Initiative Centre for fight against regional crime operates in Bucharest, and most countries sitting on this body are SEECP members," Ungureanu stressed.

During her visit at the SECI Center in May, 2005 - Mrs. Nancy Powell, Acting Assistant of Secretary of State within the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs of the USA State Department, stated:



"Thank you very much for the very comprehensive review of SECI Center's special contribution to combating crime in South-eastern Europe and to building regional cooperation. The United States is proud to have been SECI's partner in this effort and looks forward to more cooperation in the future. Best wishes for many years of cooperation".

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The Special Co-coordinator of the Stability Pact Initiative to fight Organized Crime (SPOC) in South Eastern Europe and Special Coordinator for the SECI Center, Dr. Erhard Busek, welcomed the European Commission's SECI Center Assessment Report, which concluded that the Bucharest-based SECI Regional Center for Combating Trans-Border Crime has played a major role in developing law-enforcement cooperation, and has contributed to the overall regional security and political stabilization.

The independent evaluation aimed at assessing the SECI Center's contribution to fighting organized crime in the Balkans, as well as its compatibility with similar efforts by existing European Union mechanisms.

According to the findings of this Report, the SECI member states should make more systematic use of the Center as an instrument for regional law enforcement operations. It also said that the EU should provide assistance to the Center and its member states in upgrading it into an institution meeting all legal and operational requirements.

"This is excellent news for the region," said Dr. Busek. "I am very pleased to hear that the region has not only passed the test but exceeded the expectations."

Dr. Busek also said that the region must now show even stronger commitment to the Center in order to implement the findings of the report. "I look forward to seeing joint investigation teams beginning to eliminate organized criminal groups in the Balkans. This would fulfill the ambitions expressed in the 2002 London Declaration," he added.

At the end of his mandate as SPOC Chairman, Mr. Hubert Pirker, declared:

"During my 2005 meetings to all South Eastern European capitals, I recalled to all responsible ministries that the SECI Center for Combating Transborder Crime further needs to be supported and promoted in and outside the region. Given the recent history of distrust that exists between certain SECI States, the success in bringing these countries together in order to exchange information and work collectively in the fight against organised crime is a major achievement of the SECI Center, which must be promulgated. It is a very concrete example of joint policing activities fighting organised criminal activities.

The SECI Center is now well placed within the future planning of Europol activities towards the Balkans. The financial commitment of the European Commission proves that the Center has now all chances to become THE regional policing tool with enhanced efficiency in regional cooperation against overall organised crime for South Eastern Europe. Furthermore, the recent election of an experienced Slovenian Director to the SECI Center proves the interest of the EU Member States for it."

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

During 2005, the relations between the SECI Center and ICPO-Interpol and World Customs Organization continuously improved.

On 25.03.2005 the Memorandum of Understanding on Co-operation between the World Customs Organisation and the SECI Center was signed. The Memorandum of Understanding recognizes the needs for cooperation between customs and police services at national, regional and international level in the fight against transborder crime. Through this Memorandum is expressed the wish for coordinating the efforts within the framework of the mission assigned to the two organizations.

The WCO offered valuable assistance to the SECI Center by providing its CENCOMM Communicating System to share real time information on petroleum product consignments departing/arriving in the SEE region, in the framework of the Operation code-named Black Pearl.

Following the entering into force of the Cooperation Agreement on Communication Connectivity for the Exchange of Information between the ICPO- Interpol and the SECI Center, in 2005 started its implementations. This Agreement gives the possibility for the police liaison officers working at the SECI Center to use the new communication system of Interpol "the I-24/7 network".



Signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding between the SECI Center and EURISC Foundation May 26, 2005

An important step in the efficient fight against cross-border crime is the coordination of the law enforcement authorities' efforts; it is equally essential to set up good relations between law enforcement authorities and prosecutor's offices in the region. This is part of a strategy for ensuring close cooperation between the Law Enforcement Authorities and Judicial Authorities. In this respect and according to an initiative of Serbia and Montenegro for setting-up a Regional Prosecutorial Group, the SECI Center supported and facilitated the activities of the **South East European Prosecutors Advisory Group (SEEPAG)**.

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