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This report has been prepared based on the contribution of SELEC Member States.
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Foreword
Another novelty is that SELEC expanded its training resources portfolio, introducing a new training module based on Virtual Reality. This fresh set of training resources include also a collection of multimedia course activities based on interactive scenarios, offering the opportunity to implement modern training strategies, in step with the ever-changing challenges law enforcement institutions have to face.

In this aspect, SELEC is committed to continue supporting the law enforcement authorities of its 11 Member States and 24 partners with the aim of further enhancing the coordination and cooperation in countering more effectively all forms of trans-border crimes, including serious and organized crime.

The outstanding results achieved throughout all these 20 years are owed to the efforts, devotion and commitment of the law enforcement authorities of our Member States and Partners, and I take this opportunity to express my gratitude for their relentless work and continuous support.

Snejana MALEEVA
Director General

I am pleased to introduce the 2019 Annual Report of the Southeast European Law Enforcement Center (SELEC) that presents the main general activities conducted by SELEC in the year when we celebrated our 20th anniversary.

With this occasion we organized a high level conference during which a Joint Declaration was adopted, the present Ministers, Heads of Police and Customs, Ambassadors, representatives of Partners expressed their appreciation as regards the achievements of SELEC obtained during the 20 years of successful law enforcement cooperation, and re-confirmed their full support to the work and further development of SELEC.

In 2019 we also opened a new state-of-the-art, highly secured, Operational Center Unit and developed a customized application (S.I.R.A.T.) in order to ensure a fast collection, analysis and exchange of strategic and operational information among Case Officers, National Focal Points, SELEC Liaison Officers and SELEC analysts. The IT solution implemented in SELEC Headquarters is based on a high-reliability and availability infrastructure capable of delivering fast, uninterrupted service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
At a glance
In 2019 SELEC celebrated 20 years of ever growing law enforcement cooperation

2019 marked the opening of the new state-of-the-art Operational Center Unit

United Kingdom became SELEC’s Operational Partner

Almost 21 tons opium based drugs seized in Southeast Europe

The number of exchanges of information and requests of assistance reached 30,222

A total of 438,099 migrants were detected by SELEC Member States

A total of 1.5 billion cigarettes seized by SELEC Member States

A social media awareness campaign against cigarettes smuggling, conducted in Greece, Romania and Turkey, reached 15.5 million people

SELEC enlarged its portfolio with a Virtual Reality platform for trainings
Who are we
About SELEC

The Southeast European Law Enforcement Center (SELEC) is the only law enforcement organization in Southeast Europe that joins the resources and expertise of Police and Customs authorities of its eleven Member States with the aim of countering more effectively all forms of trans-border crime, in particular serious and organized crime, as well as facilitating and boosting the cooperation in the region.

Established in 1999 as SECI Center, transformed in SELEC in 2011 with a stronger legal base and mandate, SELEC has evolved from an operational platform to combat all forms of trans-border crimes to an indispensable segment of the region’s security, and one of the most successful examples of law enforcement regional cooperation.

During these 20 years since its establishment, SELEC’s operational activities had gradually developed, the Center continuing to remain the most reliable and cost-effective cooperation platform for its Member States and Partners (countries and organizations) and, in general in the region, as a key player in the fight against serious and organized crime.

Member States

The 11 Member States of SELEC, parties to the Convention of the Southeast European Law Enforcement Center are:

- Republic of Albania
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Republic of Bulgaria
- Hellenic Republic
- Hungary
- Republic of Moldova
- Montenegro
- Republic of North Macedonia
- Romania
- Republic of Serbia
- Republic of Turkey

Area of expertise

In the constant effort to support its Member States, SELEC provides a multinational expertise to law enforcement authorities across Southeast Europe by:

- offering the necessary platform for exchanging rapidly information and requests of assistance
- supporting joint investigations, regional operations, operational meetings, expert missions
- providing a secure communication channel
- delivering quality analytical products
- contributing to the capacity building of the Member States and Partners
- delivering specialized trainings
- organizing regional conferences, Task Force meetings, workshops, study visits
- facilitating networking

Complementing the work of Police and Customs, since 2003, under SELEC’s auspices is functioning the Southeast European Prosecutors Advisory Group (SEEPAG), its mission being to facilitate judicial cooperation in significant trans-border crime investigation and cases.

SEEPAG is formed by experienced prosecutors and judges, professionals working in the international cooperation in legal matters field, each country having one appointed member representing the respecting country.
SELEC Partnerships

Besides the 11 Member States, SELEC also has 24 partner countries and organizations, and has established numerous partnerships with other organizations and bodies, as well as with the private sector.

Cooperation with SELEC is available to any state or international organization or body which has an interest in the law enforcement cooperation in Southeast Europe, the SELEC Convention providing the possibility to be granted the status of Operational Partner or Observer to SELEC.

The **Operational Partner** status grants the right to exchange personal data, to participate in SELEC activities, to attend all meetings, including operational meetings, and to post a representative at the SELEC Headquarters in order to implement the cooperation agreement concluded between SELEC and the respective Operational Partner.

Currently SELEC has 4 Operational Partners, namely:

- INTERPOL
- Italy
- United Kingdom
- USA

The **Observer Status** entails the right to receive strategic information, to attend events organized by SELEC, to be informed about SELEC activities, and to place at its cost a representative at SELEC.

Below are the countries and organizations that presently have the status of Observer to SELEC:

- Austria
- Belgium
- Belarus
- Czech Republic
- EUBAM
- France
- GCC-CIC
- Georgia
- Germany
- IOM
- Israel
- Japan
- The Netherlands
- Slovak Republic
- Spain
- Switzerland
- Ukraine
- UNMiK
- UNODC
- WCO

**SELEC has Observer status to:**

- Conference of the Parties to United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
- International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- UNODC Convention on Narcotic Drugs
- Council of Europe Cyber Convention Committee
- Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC)
Under SELEC’s auspices, complementing the work of Police and Customs, in 2003 was established and is efficiently functioning ever since the Southeast European Prosecutors Advisory Group (SEEPAG), having the same 11 Member States as SELEC.

SEEPAG is an international mechanism of judicial cooperation, formed by the countries of Southeast Europe with an express intention of facilitating judicial cooperation in significant trans-border crime investigations and cases.

SEEPAG has regular meetings, the 30th SEEPAG Conference having as a topic “The Challenges faced by the SEEPAG Countries in International Judicial Cooperation in Combating Transnational Organized Crime and Proposals for Solution”, organized by SELEC in the framework of the Turkish Chairmanship, was held in Istanbul on 2nd of April 2019.

The event was attended by the Deputy Minister of Justice of Republic of Turkey, The Chief Prosecutor of Istanbul, The Director General, Deputy Director and Head of the International Cooperation Department from the Turkish Ministry of Justice, the Director General of SELEC and prosecutors and judges from Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kingdom of Belgium, Republic of Bulgaria, Hellenic Republic, Hungary, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Republic of Serbia, Republic of Turkey and representatives of the Black Sea Prosecutors Network (supported by EU-ACT), CASC Network (supported by UNODC), Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Southeast European Law Enforcement Center (SELEC), Union of Turkish Notaries and US Department of Justice.

During the conference the participants shared the challenges and problems faced in international cooperation, in executing mutual legal assistance requests, extradition requests, a/o, as well as in establishing Joint Investigation Teams (JITs).

**Organizational structure**

**The Council** is the highest decision-making body of SELEC, consisting in high-level representatives of SELEC Member States, having the authority to act on behalf of their States. Among others, the Council takes decisions about strategies, financial matters, elects the SELEC Management, approves applications for memberships and operational partnerships, as well as the conclusion of agreements.

**The Management of SELEC** consists in:

- **The Director General** is the chief executive officer and legal representative of SELEC, having a 4 (four) years mandate.
- **The Directors** are elected for a term of 3 (three) years. Presently, SELEC has a Director for Operations and a Director for Legal and Internal Affairs.

**SELEC National Units** consist in Liaison Officers and National Focal Points (NFPs).

For the purposes of Police and Customs cooperation, each Member State and Operational Partner post at SELEC Headquarters Liaison Officers that work together on a daily basis, thus facilitating the real-time exchange of information and requests of assistance, participating in operational meetings, joint investigations, regional operations, a/o

**The National Focal Points** act as the single point of contact in the Member States for communications with SELEC, through the Liaison Officers of the respective Member State ensuring the rapid information flow, by collecting and distributing the information requests and answers from and to the law enforcement authorities and the Liaison Officers posted at SELEC Headquarters.
SELEC’s 20th anniversary

On 31st of October 2019, SELEC organized in Bucharest/Romania the high level conference on “Strengthening the cooperation in the fight against trans-border serious and organized crime in Southeast Europe” that marked SELEC’s 20th anniversary. The Conference was attended by high level officials from the Ministries of Interior and law enforcement authorities of SELEC Member States, Ambassadors and representatives of SELEC’s Operational Partners.

The Conference provided the proper forum to assess the achievements of SELEC during these 20 years, and for discussing key topics and challenges faced by the law enforcement authorities in the fight against serious and organized crime in the region, with the general objective to identify strategic solutions that can boost the effectiveness of the cooperation among the SELEC Member States and partners.

The Director General of SELEC, Mrs. Snejana Maleeva, presented SELEC’s activities, results and achievements obtained throughout these 20 years of successful functioning, and used this opportunity to express appreciation for the support of the law enforcement authorities and the dedication of the officers for their continuous endeavours in combating trans-border serious and organized crime in the region.

With this occasion, the new Operational Center Unit equipped with the latest technology, connecting all SELEC National Focal Points and having a customized software called S.I.R.A.T.- SELEC Intelligence Reporting Application Tool- was introduced to the participants.

The Member States and Operational Partners’ representatives appreciated the activities and capabilities that SELEC demonstrated until now, and affirmed their strong commitment to sustain the capacity of SELEC through active contribution to the operational activities. SELEC was re-confirmed being the unique law enforcement organization fighting against all forms of crime with the purpose of ensuring the security and stability in Southeast Europe.

The high level representatives adopted a Joint Declaration recalling the achievements made by SELEC throughout these 20 years, and reconfirming their commitment to support SELEC in achieving its important mission to continue to serve as an efficient platform of cooperation aiming at countering crime, as well as they expressed the readiness to strengthen multilateral cooperation and take further actions for enhancing the cooperation in the fight against transnational serious and organized crime.

The new SELEC video was presented during the event to the participants, the video being now available on www.selec.org.
What we do
Exchange of Information

The exchange of information is one of the main operational activities in combating trans-border serious and organized crime carried out by the Member States and Operational Partners, under SELEC’s coordination and support. The exchange is conducted upon request or at the own initiative of one Member State, in compliance with the provisions of the SELEC Convention, and within the competence of the relevant authorities of the SELEC Member States. The exchange of information and request of assistance is done through a secure communication system which includes also dedicated mobile terminals that are VPN communication secured.

The exchange of information and requests of assistance is carried out through the National Units composed of Liaison Officers (LOs) and National Focal Points (NFP).

The deployment of the Liaison Officers posted permanently by the Member States at SELEC Headquarters ensure that the exchange of information is conducted in a professional and timely manner, with respect to personal data protection, as regulated by the SELEC Convention.

During 2019 the total number of exchanges of requests and information increased to 30,222.

Joint Investigations

The joint investigations conducted in the framework of SELEC are developed among the law enforcement officers and prosecutors, upon the request coming from at least two Member States, aiming to tackle criminal organizations and/or individuals acting in the field of trans-border serious and organized crime. The objective is to exchange additional intelligence and plan future operational and judicial activities in the respective territories of the involved Member States.

Throughout 2019 a number of 81 joint investigations were carried under SELEC umbrella and 108 operational meetings were supported by SELEC in order to ensure their success.

The highest number of joint investigations was recorded in the area of drug trafficking, and financial and computer crime.

The number of exchanges of information and requests of assistance, as well as the joint investigations stand as proof that SELEC provides effective support and prompt response to the Member States’ law enforcement authorities in the fight against trans-border crime.

Regional Operations

Based on the proposals of the Member States, SELEC organizes Regional Operations that are discussed and agreed upon during Task Force meetings.

Regional Operations focus on trans-border crimes and follow an Operational Plan drafted by the initiating Member State authority in cooperation with the Task Force Managers and SELEC.

Last year, at the initiative of the Albanian authorities, we organized Regional Operation ECLIPSE IV implemented by SELEC in two Operational Phases, by making use of the facilities offered by the new Operational Center Unit.

All SELEC Member States participated in the Operation, together with Interpol and the Italian Republic-SELEC’s Operational Partners. In order to support and intensify the exchange of information, all the participant Member States as well as the aforementioned Operational Partners deployed one expert during the second operational phase.
In an effort to constantly increase the support provided to the Member States in countering trans-border crime in Southeast Europe, SELEC has recently added to its operational capacities a new state-of-the-art, highly secured Operational Center Unit.

The hardware architecture is flexible, scalable and provides high data security. It includes the integration and communication with National Focal Points of the Member States with voice and video communication solutions. The mobile communication is also secured through VPN.

A crisis steering committee room is integrated into the Operational Center Unit, with fully encrypted voice, data and video communication.

The Operational Center Unit (OCU), that includes the customized SELEC Intelligence Reporting Application Tool (S.I.R.A.T), is based on a high-reliability infrastructure capable of delivering 24/7 fast service.

The IT solution comprises an operational platform including Geographic Information System (GIS), real-time situation awareness, incident management, reporting, Data Analytics Law Enforcement Intelligence Application, Collection Information Tool and a Document Management System.

The customized S.I.R.A.T application ensures a fast collection, analysis and exchange of strategic and operational information among Case Officers, National Focal Points, SELEC Liaison Officers and SELEC analysts.

Operation ECLIPSE IV focused on suspicious consignments of cigarettes, raw tobacco and smoking tobacco throughout Southeast Europe by all modes of transportation (air, sea, rail, road and container) targeting cigarettes, cigars, raw tobacco, smoking tobacco, raw material for tobacco production (e.g. cigarette paper rolls, cellulose acetate fibres, cork cigarette tipping paper), tobacco production machines and spare parts.

In both operational phases intensified inspection activities and intelligence gathering were carried out by the participating countries and Operational Partners in order to detect any tobacco smuggling activities.

In the first operational phase, a number of 925 pieces of information was exchanged between the participating authorities through the national contact points, and 54 seizures reported within the 5 working days. The seizures summed approximately 23 million pieces of cigarettes, 863 kg of smoking tobacco and 32 kg of water-pipe tobacco.
Task Forces

SELEC’s operational activities are addressing the main crime areas in the region, such as drug trafficking, smuggling of migrants, human beings trafficking, financial and computer crime, smuggling and customs fraud, terrorism, container security, environment and nature related crimes, stolen vehicles, specialized Task Forces being established in this regard, namely:

Task Force on Countering Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration
  Anti-Drug Trafficking Task Force
  Financial and Computer Crime Task Force
  Anti-Fraud and Anti-Smuggling Task Force
  Anti-Terrorism Task Force
  Container Security Task Force
  Stolen Vehicles Task Force
  Environment and Nature Related Crimes Task Force

Task Forces assume joint cooperation and participation of SELEC Member States' law enforcement representatives, aiming to share information, best practices and effective crime-fighting and prevention tools in Southeast Europe.

Task Forces are hubs of specialized counter crime methodologies and good practices, coordinated by one or more Member States, focusing on combating trans-border serious and organized crime.

Analytical Products

Strategic analysis provides a wide-range overview and an early warning of threats on different crime areas in Southeast Europe, as well as support the decision-makers in completing their understanding on a respective situation, in order to better deal with emerging crimes e.g. updating legislation/methodologies, allocation of resources towards different types of crime, setting national priorities, etc.

SELEC elaborates operational analytical products on specific trans-border cases, prepares draft evaluation reports of the regional operations carried out, as well as strategic annual reports on the most important types of crime in the region, i.e drugs, trafficking in human beings, illegal migration, tobacco products smuggling, a/o. The key findings of these reports are presented at the relevant chapters of this annual report.

The most comprehensive strategic report that SELEC is preparing periodically is the Organized Crime Threat Assessment for Southeast Europe (OCTA SEE), developed with the essential support of our Member States, covering a period of 5 years. OCTA SEE is a qualitative assessment, a strategic report illustrating the current situation and trends, identifying threats in SELEC Member States, highlighting vulnerabilities and opportunities revealed by various types of crimes. The report intends to cast more light on understanding of crime, while supporting the decision-making bodies in further translating ideas into national/regional strategic priorities, goals and operational action plans.

Among the analytical reports drafted in 2019 we mention:
- Report on Drug Seizures in Southeast Europe
- Report on Illegal Migration in Southeast Europe
- Report on Trafficking in Human Beings in Southeast Europe
- Annual Report on the Situation of Cigarretes and Tobacco Smuggling in Southeast Europe
Trainings

Training Center
SELEC has a fully-equipped training center within its premises, with a capacity of 70 stations.
The training center is available to all SELEC Member States and partners, its aim being to provide the necessary platform for organizing all kind of trainings, seminars, workshops addressed to the law enforcement officers.
Around 250 officers from the Member States were trained in 2019 during several trainings, as follows:

Trainings on Firearms Trafficking investigations on the Surface Web and the Dark Net

In the framework of project SIRAS – Strengthening the fight against firearms trafficking in Southeastern Europe, 2 first-level training sessions were organized by SELEC on *Firearms trafficking investigations on the Surface Web and the Dark Net*. The trainings were attended by experts in tackling firearms trafficking and cybercrime from the national Police forces of the SELEC Member States. The course took place in the training room that was duly set up under Project SIRAS, taking advantage of the equipment acquired for this purpose.
The training included mainly computer-based practical exercises and scenarios, as well as theoretical notions. It covered general knowledge of the Internet, social media, computers, dark markets, virtual currencies and undercover investigations, but also more advanced aspects, such as techniques and methods of accessing the Dark Net, OSINT tools, following/seizing virtual currency, etc.
The 2 first-level training sessions were followed by a second-level training session held during 10-14 June 2019, designed as an advanced module meant to build upon the knowledge acquired during the beginner’ sessions. The advanced training covered additional tools and techniques to perform Dark Net investigations, and the participants had the opportunity to run a complex market of their own. The theoretical and practical parts, which were mixed and balanced during the course, were successfully complemented by a train-of-trainers session which encouraged knowledge sharing and dissemination.
In accordance with the provisions of Project SIRAS, at the end of the advanced module the participants returned to their authorities with the equipment and software for online investigations that will enable them to practice what they have learnt. Thus SELEC provided the representatives of the participating countries with both the knowledge and the necessary equipment to undertake complex online investigations.
Also, in the framework of this project, SELEC deployed in 3 countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Moldova) the necessary equipment and a pilot application of the Romanian Firearms Registry, developed and upgraded in line with the recent EU legislation changes.
**Trainings on cybercrime**

Considering that cybercrime is continuously growing, having a serious impact on most trans-border crime areas, SELEC initiated a partnership with the Council of Europe for organizing several trainings in order to increase the capacity building of the law enforcement authorities in the field of cybercrime with the overall purpose to improve regional coordination and cooperation in Southeast Europe in fighting cybercrime and related crime.

The trainings aimed to increase the skills, expertise and knowledge of the law enforcement officers on investigating the Darkweb and/or virtual currencies that would result in more efficient and effective investigative efforts, having a direct impact on the criminal threats.

The training sessions tackled, among others, topics such as communication platforms, use of Darknet and virtual currencies in undercover online operations, online underground investigations, principles, instruments and preparation of an undercover online operation, a/o.

One of these jointly organized events was the **FREETOOL showcase workshop**, with the participation of cybercrime investigators and digital forensics experts from around the world.

The workshop provided law enforcement officers with basic knowledge on how to use the tools provided via FREETOL- Free Reliable Tools for Investigating Cybercrime, a project aimed developing investigation and forensic tools for the use of the law enforcement community. The showcase offered the opportunity for live demonstrations of the tools in action, testing the tools, providing feedback to the developers and ultimately deploying the tools in cybercrime investigations.

**Virtual Reality based Trainings**

At the end of 2019, SELEC expanded its training resources portfolio by introducing a new training module based on Virtual Reality, with the aim to contribute to the capacity building of the law enforcement authorities of our Member States.

The training module is structured as an independent activity, using game specific mechanics in order to offer trainees an opportunity to apply the information they’ve learned during the training in a scenario which closely matches their actual work environment.

The trainees enter a virtual environment which replicates a border crossing point and have to inspect a vehicle suspected of smuggled cigarettes transport. This mission tests their attention and perspicacity, completely immersing them in the virtual environment.
This fresh set of training resources include also a collection of multimedia course activities based on interactive scenarios. Each of these activities is built around realistic vehicles and ships inspections in search of smuggled goods. Apart from smuggling, they also address other types of cross border crimes which are frequently encountered in the daily activity of the partner institutions from the Member States.

These new training resources and activities make the training program more appealing, offering the trainer team the opportunity to implement modern training strategies, in step with the ever-changing challenges law enforcement institutions have to face.

Projects

**Project FAIT***- Fight against Illegal Trade* aims at increasing the operational capacity of SELEC and its Member States in order to create an efficient response in fighting against smuggling phenomena. This was achieved, up to now, through the organization of 20 operational meetings, organizing the 2018 and 2019 Anti-Fraud and Anti-Smuggling Task Force Meetings, opening the new state-of-the-art Operational Center Unit and creating a new platform for virtual reality based trainings. Furthermore, in 2019, in the framework of project FAIT a social media awareness campaign related to the dangers of cigarettes smuggling was conducted in three of the SELEC Member States, thus increasing the awareness regarding the phenomenon's effects and repercussions, as well as increasing the visibility of SELEC.

**Project SIRAS**- Strengthening the fight against firearms trafficking in South-Eastern Europe aimed at supporting the use in the SELEC Member Countries of data collection/analytic capabilities regarding firearms, to consolidate the investigation capacities, to improve cooperation among law enforcement authorities, to provide trainings on investigating firearms trafficking on Internet (dark web) for a better approach of the cases, to develop a regional firearms expert’s network in Southeast Europe and to draft a handbook on best practices in investigations on the Deep Web. The project supported also several operational meetings organized by the Member States in the framework of SELEC with a view of enhancing the police cooperation in firearms trafficking cases.

**Project ATHENA 1**- Addressing Training to SPOC (Single Point of Contact) as Hub of a European Network of Law Enforcement Agencies

SELEC was a partner in project A.T.H.E.N.A 1 that aimed developing an effective coordination of training on law enforcement information exchange for the Single Points of Contact (SPOC), the promotion of a common law enforcement culture and the creation of a consolidated proactive network of SPOC Heads and staff.

In 2019 SELEC was involved in the national study visits that took place in Romania, events hosted by SELEC, during which the participants from the beneficiary countries were acquainted with SELEC, its mission and activities, and shared our experience and expertise in regional law enforcement cooperation. SELEC was also involved in the organization of the 2nd Steering Committee meeting held at SELEC on 18-19 of April 2019, event co-organized with the Romanian partners in the project.

One of the achievements of the project was developing a Training Manual for Single Point of Contact Operators, a comprehensive manual containing information about the SPOC’s role, functioning, legal framework, main procedures, choosing of channel, European and international tools for end users, and many other useful information, as well as practical exercises to be solved by the trainees. SELEC is presented in this Manual, having a dedicated section at the “International Organizations”.

**Project ECOFIT**-Options for Enhancing Investigative Tool in the area of Firearms Trafficking aims at enhancing operational law enforcement cooperation between EU Member States and Southeast European Countries in the fight against firearms trafficking through the development of more effective and efficient investigative tools. The project shall benefit a wide range of stakeholders in the EU and beyond, by:

1. Strengthening law-enforcement agencies' operational role;
2. Improving cooperation in investigations of trans-border firearms trafficking offences;
3. Supporting effective cross-border cooperation between judicial and law enforcement agencies;
4. Ensuring coordination with bilateral, regional and multilateral actions and initiatives.

*Project financed by PMI IMPACT, a global grant initiative of Philip Morris International to support projects dedicated fighting illegal trade and related crimes.*
**Project “Strengthening cooperation against trans-border organized crime”** to be developed with the financial assistance of Danube Transnational Programme for a period of three years, aims at enhancing cooperation in the region by ensuring a common approach in the fight against trans-border crime.

In the same time the project will focus on facilitating cooperation and share of good practices by bringing together experts from law enforcement authorities at regional level, as well as international organisations and representatives of the private sector.

The 3 regional conferences to be organized in the framework of this project shall be focused on cybercrime, drug trafficking, human beings trafficking and illegal migration, and shall assume joint cooperation and participation of SELEC Member States and Danube region law enforcement representatives, aiming to share information, best practices and effective crime-fighting and prevention tools in the region, as well as facilitating networking.

**Project ATHENA 2- Addressing Threat assessment through an European Network of Law Enforcement Agencies** shall support coordinated evaluation of joint activities (patrols, investigation teams, cross-border surveillance) managed by the beneficiaries (SELEC, Italy, Bulgaria, Latvia, Malta, Romania and Slovenia) and their neighboring countries.

24 cross border observations, 24 joint operations, 12 joint investigations, 24 joint patrols and 6 thematic workshops will be managed, with approximately 300 officers involved. 24 bilateral meetings focusing on planning, coordinating and evaluating operational joint activities will be also organized.

A mobile app for supporting joint operations will be also designed along with an analysis tool to be integrated in national Case Management Systems. Project ATHENA 2 is a follow-up of ATHENA 1, therefore the other activities developed in the first phase will be further carried out during the implementation of this 24 months project.

**Social media awareness campaign**

SELEC conducted, with the financial support received through project FAIT, an awareness campaign with a very strong regional impact, with the final aim to decrease the number of cigarettes smuggled into EU via SELEC region.

The social media awareness campaign, implemented for a duration of six months in three SELEC Member States (Greece, Romania and Turkey), was directed towards consumers and, amongst other things, presented the risks that smuggling of cigarettes represent. Cigarette smuggling finances organized crime and corruption, affects the health of the consumers, the state budget and, on the long term, future generations.

The campaign was conducted on Facebook and YouTube and consisted in various static and dynamic posts containing suggestive messages, as well as in short videos.

The slogan of the campaign was „A smuggled cigarette is not just a cigarette”.

The key performance indicators for each of the three countries were surpassed, the messages reaching 2 million persons in Greece, 2.5 million persons in Romania and 11 million persons in Turkey.

This also raised awareness about SELEC and brought new subscribers and viewers on our SELEC webpage and on our Facebook account.
Drug trafficking
Drug trafficking

Specialized Task Force

The Anti-Drug Trafficking Task Force is successfully functioning in SELEC since year 2000, being coordinated by Republic of Bulgaria and having regular annual meetings.

During 12-13 November 2019, SELEC organized in Sofia/Republic of Bulgaria an Interdisciplinary Workshop aiming to explore the connections between firearms and drug trafficking, with the participation of Police and Customs experts from all SELEC Member States and representatives of SELEC’s Operational Partners and Observers, such as France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK (NCA), USA (DEA), Interpol, Europol and RILO ECE.

The representatives of the SELEC Management underlined the importance of the topic, as drugs trafficking and firearms trafficking are interlinked criminal activities that pose a serious threat in the region. Member countries representatives presented cases showing links between firearms trafficking and drugs trafficking, national and international joint investigations, challenges and good practices, ways in which drug trafficking groups procure their firearms, delivery and disposal methods, barter trades, latest *modi operandi* regarding transport and concealment of drugs and firearms, the main purpose of the firearms possession – trafficking/use, the types of firearms prevailing, etc.

Also, in 2019 SELEC co-organized with the Police Liaison Office of the Embassy of Italy the Workshop “The Palermo Convention - A quick tool in the fight against drugs trafficking”, event held at SELEC Training Center on 14 November 2019, with the participation of police officers and prosecutors from all SELEC Member States. The purpose of the workshop was to further strengthen the operational capabilities of the SELEC Member States to combat drug trafficking through the use of the tools provided by the Palermo Convention, in particular the use of joint investigation teams.

Key findings of the 2019 Report on Drug Seizures in Southeast Europe

**Opium-Based Drugs/Heroin**

- The opium-based drugs (opium, heroin and morphine) seized in Southeast Europe – almost 21 tons
- In terms of quantities, opiates at *the highest level in the past five years*
- Opiates - increase by 5.1%
- Heroin (almost 20 tons) - upsurge by 7.1% and represents 95.7% of the total quantity of opiates, being the most important opium-based drug smuggled
- Opium-based drugs transported by land touring vehicles, mostly by lorries
- The most frequently concealment mode - “in freight”
- 76.5% on risk analysis and 14.2% of total quantity is based on intelligence
- The estimated value of the seized heroin: approx. 600 million EUR
Cocaine

- The cocaine seized amounts more than 2.4 tons
- The total detained quantity increased by 35.4%
- Cocaine smuggled from the producers from South America, direct or via trans-shipment points
- Large-scale smuggling occurs usually at the ports of the region
- Cocaine is shipped predominantly by maritime containers
- Smaller amounts are trafficked through the international airports
- The estimated value of the cocaine: around 200 million EUR

Cannabis

- Cannabis is the most produced and trafficked illicit drug in the region
- In 2015, cannabis products were at the lowest level in the past 5 years; The amount seized in 2017 comes very close to the figures registered in 2013-2014; In 2018, the total amount of cannabis products (marijuana and hashish) - close to 125 tons; decreased by 58.4%
- 68.4% were herbal cannabis (marijuana) and 31.6% hashish
- Illegal plantations: 110,944 kg and 10,282,525 pieces/plants
- Marijuana - over 85 tons - decline by 59.5%
- Hashish - over 39 tons - decrease by 55.6%
- Marijuana routes - a focus on the South West and central branches of the Balkan Route
- Western European countries - main destinations
- Balkan Route exploited also in its reverse direction, large quantities being delivered to Turkey
- At regional level, marijuana transported by land (lorry) and maritime (by speed boats)
- The estimated value of marijuana: around 1 billion EUR; hashish: around 600 million EUR

Synthetic Drugs

- Amphetamine: 3,832 cases 993.997 kilograms and 10.623 litres (24.2% drop)
- MDMA: 10,823 cases 2,769.872 kilograms (0.6% increase)
- Methamphetamine: 13,885 cases 587.406 kilograms (11.7% decline)
- 9 million EUR – Amphetamine; 100 million EUR – Ecstasy; 11 million EUR - Methamphetamine
- Not excluded that organized crime groups or individuals would try import in bulk and pack NPS for distribution, or even to produce.
The Controlled Delivery Manual is designed to assist law enforcement officers in South-East Europe in launching controlled delivery operations to combat the trafficking of illicit drugs and their precursors. The Manual is continuously updated by SELEC in co-operation with the Strategic Police Matters Unit of the OSCE Transnational Threats Department.

The Controlled Delivery Manual for South-East European Countries provides practitioners from 17 SELEC countries and observers with the contact details of authorized officers in these countries who are responsible for controlled deliveries. The Manual describes the legislation or rules governing controlled deliveries in each country of the region and explains how to request such a measure. It also outlines the role of foreign authorities in a controlled delivery, clarifies the possibility of substitution, the duration of such measures, and the contact details of respective authorities as well as other relevant information.

This Manual is designed for the use by law enforcement agencies and judiciaries.

Online Controlled Delivery Manual

SELEC participates within Council of Europe's drug policy network – the Pompidou Group – joining the efforts for creating and updating a handbook in cooperation with Eurojust, Europol, Interpol, OSCE and the Council of Europe’s Committee PC-OC. The online manual, restricted to law enforcement and the judiciary, makes more efficient the “controlled deliveries” of illicit commodities.

By providing information to law enforcement and the judiciary in an easily accessible and constantly updated online format, the handbook enhances cooperation across borders, and improve international coordination that is required to effectively carry out controlled delivery schemes.

The access is granted to law enforcement and judicial authorities representatives.

Joint investigations

A number of 37 joint investigations were conducted by the Member States in the framework and with SELEC’s support. Among them we mention:

**Joint investigation REACTION** in the field of heroin trafficking, was conducted by the Bulgarian and Turkish law enforcement authorities. The drugs, hidden in a special concealment of the lorry, were intended for Western Europe, coming from Turkey, via Bulgaria. The SELEC Liaison Officers of the two countries used SELEC channel for the swift communication. Operational meetings, supported by SELEC, were also held with the purpose to ensure the success of this joint investigation. During the course of the investigation 67 kg of heroin were seized, the value of the drugs in Bulgaria at that time was around 1 million euro.
Joint investigation SYNERGIA/ BREZI I GJELBËR was conducted against an organized crime group dealing with drug trafficking from Albania to Greece and further distributed in other EU countries. With the parallel investigations running in both countries, and due to the instant exchange of gathered intelligence among the Albanian and Hellenic Officers the investigation led to the identification of several members of the criminal group and their modus operandi. During the investigations via intelligence led operations several seizures took place and finally, in joint operation, the whole chain of the criminal group was disrupted with the arrest and prosecution of sixty-one (61) members of the group.

Following this joint investigation more than 1 ton of cannabis and 1.23 kg of heroin and cocaine were seized, as well as military cartridges, 78 mobile phones, 25 different vehicles (cars, motor-cycles, etc) and significant amounts of money.

The real time information exchange in this case has been done through the Police Liaison Officers of Albania, Hellenic Republic, North Macedonia and Turkey posted at SELEC. SELEC supported also several operational meetings.

Joint investigation HORIZON conducted between Greek and Romanian authorities in relation to high risk drugs trafficking, targeted to dismantle an organized crime group consisting in Albanian and Greek nationals. The route of trafficking for cannabis and cocaine was Albania–Greece-Bulgaria-Romania.

Their modus operandi was highly organized and insidious: they co-opt Romanian citizens who intermediate the drug delivery from traffickers to distributors. The intermediaries received minimal information and were controlled by using threats. The evidences and the information obtained revealed that the group members brought the drugs in Romania from Albania through Greece-Bulgaria, by having criminal connections in these countries.

3 Albanian suspects were arrested in Romania while trying to traffic 60 kg of cannabis across the country.

Joint investigation SURPRISE related to the trafficking of cocaine, conducted between the Turkish and Bulgarian Police Forces was finalized at the end of May 2019.

Following 1 month exchange of information through SELEC channel, Turkish National Police Istanbul Narcotics Department with the support of Bulgarian Police Drug Department managed to seize 19.5 kg of cocaine. The cocaine was transported by car to Turkey from Bulgaria. The car was stopped in Istanbul and the cocaine captured.

One person was apprehended already, but the investigation is currently ongoing in order to determine the other members involved.
Trafficking in human beings and illegal migration
Trafficking in human beings and illegal migration

Specialized Task Force

Since year 2000 in the framework of SELEC is functioning the Task Force on Countering Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration that has regular meetings and it’s being coordinated by Romania.

The 26th meeting of the Task Force on Countering Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration was held on 26 of September 2019, in Ohrid/Republic of North Macedonia, with the participation of law enforcement experts from SELEC Member States and representatives of the partners. The meeting was jointly organized with the support of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Republic of North Macedonia and OSCE Mission in Skopje.

During the meeting, the key findings of the latest SELEC Report on Trafficking in Human Beings in Southeast Europe and the Report on Smuggling of Migrants in Southeast Europe were presented.

The aim of the meeting was the evaluation of the regional situation on trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants for the year 2018, discussing trafficking in persons’ related issues and planning future related operational activities.

In 2019 SELEC participated at the Joint Action Day (JAD) Western Balkans 2019, an international operation involving law enforcement officers from 30 EU and non-EU countries (including SELEC Member States), as well as 8 agencies and international organizations, namely SELEC, Europol, Frontex, Interpol, PCC SEE, SEESAC, UNODC and IPA/2017 Countering Serious Crime in the Western Balkans.

The preparatory phase began at the beginning of 2019 with several operational meetings and intelligence-gathering activities organized by all the participants.

In the first stage, SELEC participated at the preparatory meeting with all involved stakeholders where the Operational Plan was discussed and agreed.

During the action day, SELEC set up a 24/7 point of contact in order to ensure the communication with the partners during the operational phase.

The JAD was focused on tackling firearms trafficking, illegal immigration, document fraud and drugs trafficking.

Report on Illegal Migration in Southeast Europe

Southeast Europe has been a longstanding transit region for the migration flows travelling from Asia and Northern Africa towards Western European countries. In 2018 a total of 438,099 migrants were detected by the law enforcement authorities in SELEC Member States. Following a descending trend highlighted by the statistics for 2016 and 2017, data for 2018 is highlighting a threefold increase of detected migrants compared with the previous year.
Similar with the previous year, Turkey (268,003 detections) and Greece (93,367 detections), the countries facing the biggest migratory pressure, reported the highest figures at regional level, while the most relevant increase was reported by Bosnia and Herzegovina, currently the main country of exit for the migration flow towards EU.

Due to the extensive countermeasures applied by law enforcement authorities in Southeast Europe, the migrants may have been discouraged to further use the route through Southeast Europe towards Western European countries, but an important number of migrants remained stranded between the borders of the Member States, seeking to continue their travel towards the countries of destination and thus, reorienting towards criminal networks providing smuggling services and fraudulent travel documents.

Thus, different from the previous years when the number of migrants detected at the borders was considerable higher than inland, in terms of place of detection, in 2018 the share of inland detections (83,465 detections) was almost equal with the number of detections made at the borders of SELEC Member States (86,631 detections).

Citizens of Pakistan, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq represent, for the fourth year consecutively, the most important share of non-regional migrants detected inland or at the borders of SELEC Member States. Compared with the previous year, an over 50% increase in the illegal border crossings was reported for migrants from Pakistan, Iran, Palestine, Bangladesh, Libya, India, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon.

As a general rule, the border crossing and the transit along the routes is facilitated by criminal networks which have connections in the countries of origin, destination as well as in neighboring countries, ensuring continuity and facilitating the migrants through the entire route.

The human smuggling criminal networks investigated by the Member States generally consist in members of various citizenships, foreigners (Syrian, Afghan, Iraqi and Iranian), as well as citizens of the SELEC Member States. The leaders are usually foreigners, sharing the same origin with the migrants and, in most cases, are not located in the countries where the smuggling activities are organized. Furthermore, it was observed a significant involvement of foreigners with temporary residence or asylum seekers in the countries were the organized crime groups organize the smuggling process.

The use of forged travel documents is also very common and has registered a rise that led to an increase of the activity of the organized crime groups engaged in forging documents. The abuse of legal asylum system continues to represent a tool in the hands of the migrants and smugglers who apply for asylum in order to avoid detention, as well as administrative and penal measures.

Within the region, the routes used by migrants remained fluid, highly depending on the connections of the criminal networks that are facilitating migration with those in the neighboring countries, on national strategies and policy changes, on countermeasures of law enforcement in particular Member States, on whether conditions, etc. Thus, over the past years, along with the diversification of the used modus operandi used by the smugglers, various displacements between the routes were seen in Southeast Europe.

In 2018 the migrants continued to enter the region through Turkey and further cross the borders with Greece. The available data is highlighting an intensification of the route through Turkey – Greece – Albania/Republic of North Macedonia – Montenegro/Serbia – Bosnia and Herzegovina and further to Croatia and Slovenia, resulting in an unprecedented increased pressure of the migration flow in Bosnia-Herzegovina, reported both inland and at the borders, while the route through Turkey – Greece/Bulgaria – Serbia/Romania – Hungary appears to have been less used by the migrants in 2018.

Following 218,339 applications for international protection lodged in SELEC Member States, in 2018 a total of 13,354 asylum applicants were granted refugee status, 21 humanitarian status and 345 subsidiary protection. More than half of the total number of requests for international protection were submitted in Turkey (114,537), followed by Greece (67,970) and by Bosnia and Herzegovina (22,499).

Apart from the risks to which migrants are exposed during the smuggling process, including the risk of becoming victims of human trafficking, risk regarding physical integrity and even their lives, smuggling of migrants produces a serious impact on the transit countries stimulating corruptive practices, while affecting the general security of the national frontiers of the countries in the region. Given the international dimension of smuggling of migrants, in order to efficiently tackle this phenomenon, there is a constant need of cooperation and partnership at international level.
Trafficking in human beings remains a serious issue and a major priority not only for law enforcement authorities in Southeastern Europe, but also worldwide. Globally, countries are detecting and reporting more victims and are convicting more traffickers.

Despite the permanent efforts of the law enforcement authorities, having in mind the large incomes obtained with a rather minimum investment from the criminal networks involved, the extent of human trafficking continues to represent a serious matter most countries are facing either internally or at international level.

At regional level, the number of identified victims of human trafficking has been following a downward trend starting with 2013, when over 2,000 were identified. Starting from 2016 and up to 2018 the total reported figures did not exceed 2,000. Except for 2017, when an 11% increase was observed, the number of identified victims has continued to decrease to a total of 1,671 human trafficking victims reported for 2018.

While human trafficking may be disguised into other criminal activities such as prostitution, property crime, labor related crime or even money laundering, a significant number of victims originating from countries in the region or internally exploited may remained unidentified.

The Member States continue to be countries of origin of victims of human trafficking exploited in Western European countries, mainly UK, Germany and Italy, tendency observed particularly for Bulgaria, Hungary, Republic of Moldova and Romania. Countries of destination for the victims are mostly Turkey and Greece, while internal trafficking, although identified in almost all Member States, is generally characteristic to human trafficking in countries including Albania, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Romania.

The main types of exploitation are different from one country to another, from the internal to the external dimension of the human trafficking process and are generally age and gender based. Nevertheless, as in the previous years, the general available data at regional level is placing sexual exploitation and exploitation for forced labor on top of the purposes identified in 2018 as well.

The social and economic vulnerability including lack of employment opportunities are acting as the main facilitating factors in the recruitment of victims of human trafficking characteristic to all types of exploitation, while the Internet and social media have been intensely used by the criminal networks to optimize the recruitment process, as well to advertise the “services” provided.

The number of human trafficking victims has been following a downward trend over the past years, a total of 1,671 being identified in 2018;

- The victims of human trafficking identified in 2018 were generally adults (66%), while the minors accounted for 26% ;
- 36% of the victims are nationals exploited in other countries, 30% national victims of internal trafficking, while 11% are foreign victims exploited in the reporting Member States;
- Data is highlighting UK, Germany and Italy on top of the countries of exploitation for the victims of human trafficking, particularly adults. Nevertheless, other countries such as Spain, Austria, Sweden, Switzerland, France and Belgium were also reported;
Data at regional level is placing sexual exploitation and exploitation for forced labor on top of the purposes identified as well in 2018;

In 50% of the cases adult victims were exploited for sexual purposes; victims exploited through forced labor accounted for 40%; exploitation for forced begging accounted for 3%, street crime for 1%, while 3 victims were exploited for tissue and organs harvesting purposes;

In 70% of the cases the exploitation of minor victims was for sexual purpose; labor exploitation was reported in 14% of the cases, street crime in 3% of the cases and begging in 2% of the cases;

Although rarely, the use of violence is used during the exploitation phase to control the victims; other methods of control: threat of violence against family members, emotional dependence, debt bondage and rarely drugs addiction;

The traffickers are acting either individually, but also as a group which may be either an organized crime group or a group without a defined organization structure. The current tendency is towards smaller groups brought together by the same interests, while the profits remain within a small group of persons;

In terms of nationality, the members of the criminal networks generally share the same nationality with the victims;

1,067 national police investigations and 259 international investigations related to trafficking in human beings were reported for 2018.

**Joint investigations**

A number of 10 joint investigations were conducted in this area by the Member States in the framework and with SELEC’s support. Among them we mention:

**Joint investigation KAJAK** was initiated after the exchange of information via SELEC channel, both Serbian and Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities conducting a mutual operation, based on the provided intelligence.

As a result, it was found out that during September- November, an illegal transport by bus was organized for approximately 200 migrants, as well as River Drina’s border crossing by rubber boats to the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and further to EU countries.

During a police operation conducted in synchronization in both countries, ten people were arrested on that occasion. During the search of the facilities used by the arrested persons, one van used to transport migrants by land was found, several rubber boats used to transport migrants across the Drina River, and money suspected to be obtained from these criminal acts were seized.

**Joint investigation NOMAD** was conducted among Hungarian, Moldovan and Romanian law enforcement authorities against an organized crime group dealing with illegal migrant smuggling at the Hungarian-Romanian state border.

Moldavian nationals and their criminal links use as *modus operandi* the transfer of migrants with forged identity documents in passenger cars and ‘forerunner’ vehicles to avoid police/border guard patrols.

Mapping up the persons’ criminal contacts, using SELEC channel for information exchange, it became evident that starting from October 2018 several transports had been concluded, involving more than 35 illegal migrants of Iraqi origin, from Romania to Hungary and further to Austria and other Western European countries.
Fraud and Smuggling
Fraud and Smuggling

Specialized Task Force

This Task Force, established in 2003 and coordinated by Republic of Albania, has regular meetings, providing a forum of discussions for experts from SELEC Member States, partner countries and organizations. During these meetings, the experts have the opportunity to share good practices and challenges, to initiate joint investigations, to evaluate the activities conducted and to decide upon further steps to be taken at regional level, as part of a common and more efficient endeavor for tackling cross-border organized crime.

The 19th meeting of the Anti-Fraud and Anti-Smuggling Task Force took place on the 21st and 22nd of May 2019 in Durres/Albania, with the participation of specialized officers from SELEC Member States and also representatives of EUBAM, Kazazi Consulting (Albania), OLAF, Philip Morris International and Kingdom of Spain. The event was organized in the context of the project FAIT*. Fight Against Illegal Trade.

Regional approaches in preventing and countering customs frauds and smuggling were discussed, with the overall aim to strengthen regional cooperation between Customs and Police in this area, and set common guidelines to be followed at regional level. At the same time, the meeting aimed to evaluate last year’s activities in the field of combating trans-border customs frauds and smuggling, as well as to discuss and plan its future activities.

The challenges posed by illicit trade can be overcome with innovative solutions, such as advanced analytics solutions, network mapping or data visualization software. These are powerful tools which can help law enforcement authorities in identifying emerging trends and patterns, or in anticipating future threats.

In the second day of the Task Force meeting, a needs assessment was conducted with the experts in order to identify training needs on the latest technology, special techniques and special investigative methods for better results in the fight against smuggling of goods. Hence, SELEC shall organize future training activities within FAIT Project for defining, implementing and fine-tuning common and tailored procedures, applicable in Southeast Europe.

2019 Annual Report on the Situation of Cigarettes and Tobacco Smuggling in Southeast Europe

Over the period under analysis, the year 2018, the Member States of SELEC seized altogether approximately 1.5 billion cigarettes, leading to a drop of 41% compared to the level recorded in 2017, when roughly 2.5 billion cigarettes were detected and seized.

The amount of cigarettes detected last year represents the sum of all quantities seized in a number of 54,358 cases. Compared to the number of cases registered by SELEC Member States in 2017, there was a slight decrease of 2% than the year before. Furthermore, in 2018, 10,073 seizures were related to quantities above 10,000 cigarettes, while those with quantities lower than 10,000 cigarettes were four times more, respectively 41,461 cases.

In 2018, the total number of cigarettes seized after routine checks was approximately 355 million, registering a decrease of 55% compared to 2017. Regarding cigarettes seizures based on intelligence gathered by SELEC Member States’ law enforcement authorities, there is an important decrease of 30%, as well as a 43% fall in seizures based on risk analysis. The other reasons of control (x-ray, sniffer dogs etc.) registered an 89% decrease comparing with the previous year.

The total quantity of smoking tobacco summed up to almost 1,000 tons, an increase of 107% compared to the previous year when 474 tons of smoking tobacco was seized. Greece reported seizing 53% of the total, followed by Turkey (38%) and Bulgaria (5%). These three Member States accounted for 96% of the overall total.

* Project financed by PMI IMPACT, a global grant initiative of Philip Morris International to support projects dedicated fighting illegal trade and related crimes.
Regarding the main types of transportation used for smuggling tobacco related products (cigarettes and smoking tobacco) the highest number of cases was related to Road transportation means - 7,808 cases and Other types (e.g. bicycle, pedestrian, inland markets) - 432 cases, which together account for 99% of the total cases reported, followed by Air Transport - 62 cases, Rail Transport - 25 cases, and Maritime/Water Transport - 18 cases.

Compared to the previous year, in 2018 the number of seizures for tobacco products (cigarettes and smoking tobacco) significantly decreased for Road transportation means (from 13,324 cases in 2017 to 7,808 cases in 2018), and Other types (from 1,134 cases in 2017 to 432 cases in 2018). Despite the small number of cases for cigarettes smuggled via maritime/water transportation - only 0.22% of the total (18 cases), the quantity of cigarettes seized accounted for 15% of the total reported (close to 110 million pieces of cigarettes), with an average of approximately 6 million cigarettes per seizure, whereas the quantity of cigarettes smuggled via road transportation (543 million pieces of cigarettes) –representing 76% of the total, was recorded in 7,808 cases, with an average of 70 thousands cigarettes per seizure.

**Regional Operation ECLIPSE IV**

Regional operation ECLIPSE IV was implemented by SELEC in two operational phases, making use of the facilities offered by the new Operational Center Unit. All SELEC Member States participated in the Operation, together with Interpol and the Italian Republic - SELEC’s Operational Partners. In order to support and intensify the exchange of information, all the participant Member States as well as the afore-mentioned Operational Partners deployed one expert during the second operational phase.

Operation ECLIPSE IV focused on suspicious consignments of cigarettes, raw tobacco and smoking tobacco throughout Southeast Europe by all modes of transportation (air, sea, rail, road and container) targeting cigarettes, cigars, raw tobacco, smoking tobacco, raw material for tobacco production (e.g. cigarette paper rolls, cellulose acetate fibres, cork cigarette tipping paper), tobacco production machines and spare parts.

In both operational phases intensified inspection activities and intelligence gathering were carried out by the participating countries and Operational Partners in order to detect any tobacco smuggling activities.

In the first operational phase, a number of 925 pieces of information was exchanged between the participating authorities through the national contact points, and 54 seizures were reported within the 5 working days. The seizures summed up approximately 23 million pieces of cigarettes, 863 kg of smoking tobacco and 32 kg of water-pipe tobacco.

**Joint investigations**

A number of 12 joint investigations were conducted by the Member States in the framework of SELEC Anti-Fraud and Anti-Smuggling Task Force.

**Joint investigation PEZHOTO** is a case related to smuggling cigarettes on the Danube River. The joint investigation was conducted between the Customs of Serbia jointly with the Police and Customs of Romania and Bulgaria, based on intelligence information and risks analysis.

The method was monitoring the voyage of the vessel ‘PEZHOTO’ that was transporting cigarettes and make the control of cargo into territorial waters of the states. After the vessel arrived at Port Giurgiu, Romanian police seized 10 million pcs of cigarettes based on the suspicion of false documentations and infringement of intellectual property rights.
**Joint investigation FIREFLY** on illegal production and smuggling of cigarettes, was conducted by the Bulgarian and Romanian authorities. The members of the organized crime group were of Romanian and Bulgarian origins. The Romanian perpetrators were living in Bulgaria and they were organizing their illegal activities by recruiting personnel for illegal factories, providing samples for future deals, meeting alleged buyers for the illegally produced cigarettes, a/o.

For several months special investigative measures were used with the purpose of collecting evidence for the criminal activity of the entire network. As a result, it was concluded that the illegal factory controlled by this organized crime group was located outside the territory of Romania and Bulgaria.

Based on the supplied information, the Belgium Police started an investigation and located the illegal factory in a warehouse in the city of Tamines/Belgium, seizing all tobacco precursors, equipment and devices found, as well as 26,350,000 pcs of cigarettes and 10,200 kg of manufactured tobacco. The total revenue loss to the state budget according to the estimation of the Belgium authorities was around 7,1 million Euro.
Financial and Computer Crime

Specialized Task Force

The Financial and Computer Crime Task Force, established in 2001 and coordinated by Republic of North Macedonia, has the following sub-groups:

- **Credit card fraud** coordinated by Romania
- **Cybercrime** coordinated by Romania
- **Money laundering** coordinated by Republic of Moldova
- **Intellectual property** coordinated by Republic of Bulgaria
- **Counterfeit money** coordinated by Republic of North Macedonia

Trainings

In 2019, in partnership with the Council of Europe, SELEC organized several trainings in order to increase the capacity building of the law enforcement authorities in the field of cybercrime.

The first event was held during 15-17 of May 2019, SELEC hosted at its Training Center the **FREETOOL showcase workshop**, with the participation of cybercrime investigators and digital forensics experts from around the world.

The workshop provided law enforcement officers with basic knowledge on how to use the tools provided via **FREETOL: Free Reliable Tools for Investigating Cybercrime**, a project aimed at developing investigation and forensic tools for the use of the law enforcement community. The showcase offered the opportunity for live demonstrations of the tools in action, testing the tools, providing feedback to the developers and ultimately deploying the tools in cybercrime investigations.

The second event was a 4 days training on online undercover investigations that took place during 17-20 September 2019, in Bucharest/ Romania, with the participation of cybercrime investigators from 11 countries from Southeastern Europe and Turkey.

The aim of the training course was to strengthen international cooperation in investigation of transnational criminal activity using special investigative techniques and to provide the cybercrime investigators with effective instruments in undercover online operations.

The training tackled, among others, topics such as communication platforms, use of Darknet and virtual currencies in undercover online operations, online underground investigations, principles and preparation of an undercover operation, a/o.
The third event organized jointly with the Cybercrime Programme Office of the Council of Europe (iPROCEEDS), was the Pilot Training on Cryptocurrency and Dark Web Investigation with the participation of investigators from all SELEC Member States. The training aimed to increase the skills, expertise and knowledge of the law enforcement officers on investigating the Darkweb and/or virtual currencies that would result in more efficient and effective investigative efforts, having a direct impact on the criminal threats.

**Joint investigations**

A number of 13 joint investigations in this field were developed in 2019 with the support of SELEC.

**Joint investigation PLAYER**, conducted among law enforcement and judicial authorities from Bulgaria, Germany and Romania targeted to disrupt an organized crime group involved in cybercrime and money laundering. Following the house searches conducted simultaneously in Bulgaria and Romania, 12 suspects were arrested and large amounts of money, luxury cars and other goods were seized. A total of 125 victims were identified so far, German citizens who, between May 2018 and March 2019, were defrauded by the members of the group with over 600,000 Euro, but the data clearly indicates a much higher prejudice of around 2 million Euro.

The joint investigation benefited of SELEC’s support in channeling the intelligence in an operative way, some of the suspects being technically surveyed cross-border, with the support of the Bulgarian and Romanian special operations team.

**Joint investigation MATRIX** targeted dismantling an organized crime group investigated by the Romanian authorities for crimes of cyber criminality, with links in Bulgaria. As a *modus operandi*, the offenders uploaded a software on a card and further withdraw different amounts of money (around 12,000 EURO each time) without those transactions to be registered in the Bulgarian bank system. Also, the criminals deposited an amount of money on the same card, for testing the software, and this value remained on the card even after the withdrawals mentioned before. It seems that this software can be used to frauds specific to certain ATMs which are to be found in Bulgaria and USA. Also, there is intelligence that the members of the organized crime group are involved in laundering the amounts of money obtained illegally and most of them are known for previous criminal activity, some of them being convicted for ATM skimming in the past in Romania. At present their criminal activity is extended in USA and Spain too, and the investigation is ongoing.
Terrorism
Specialized Task Force

The Anti-Terrorism Task Force, established in 2003, and coordinated by Republic of Turkey has the following sub-groups:

- Trafficking in small arms and light weapons coordinated by Republic of Albania
- Trafficking in weapons of mass destruction coordinated by Romania
- Terrorist groups coordinated by Republic of Turkey

Several activities were developed by SELEC in 2019 with a view of combating terrorism:

On 3-4 December 2019, in Athens/ Greece, a Regional workshop aiming at exploring aspects related to the detection, identification and tracing of firearms components was organized. The workshop was attended by specialized officers from all SELEC Member States, as well as from partner countries and organizations such as Belarus, The Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom, GCC-CIC, EUBAM, FRONTEX and INTERPOL.

The topic of the workshop was addressed from different perspectives, due to the vast participation that included representatives of Police and Border Police forces, of Customs authorities, research institutes, prosecutor’s offices, NGOs, the private sector, and international organizations. Some of the aspects discussed were: the detection of firearms, the forensic identification of firearms, traceability and trafficking of firearms, challenges in evidence gathering, INTERPOL’s tracing tools etc.

Law Enforcement experts with responsibilities in tackling firearms trafficking from all participating states presented cases investigated in the last years with particular focus on the detection, identification and tracing of firearms components, methods of concealment in cross-border shipments, disguise of firearms parts in other items, as well as other recent methods of firearms trafficking.

SELEC organized on the 14th and the 15th of May 2019 in Istanbul/Turkey, an Interdisciplinary regional workshop aiming at exploring the links between firearms trafficking and terrorism.

The workshop was attended by experts in tackling firearms trafficking from the national Police forces of the SELEC Member States, as well as by other relevant professionals from partner countries and organizations such as Austria, France, Germany, the Nordic Countries, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America, EUBAM, Europol and Interpol.

Cases investigated in the last years illustrating the links between firearms trafficking and terrorism were presented, as well as the particularities of each country with regard to the topic, including legislation, relevant units and the challenges they are facing. The presentations were followed by questions and answers, discussions and sharing of good practices.

Project SIRAS- Strengthening the fight against firearms trafficking in Southeastern Europe- implemented by SELEC was presented during the workshop, as well as the SELEC Associated Firearms Experts Network (SAFE-N), a network that is being created under the mentioned project in order to provide a pool of experts and a platform for direct exchanges among professionals from various fields and environments related to firearms.
SELEC organized during 1-5 April 2019, in Brescia/Italy a *Study visit on the topic of firearms deactivation.*

Police officers working in the field of tackling firearms trafficking and/or with responsibilities in the deactivation of firearms from most of SELEC Member States attended the study visit.

The event included visits, practical demonstrations, meetings and exchanges of good practices, hosted by the Italian Proof House (Banco Nazionale di Prova), the Police of Brescia (Questura di Brescia), a firearms factory and shooting range (Fabbrica d'Armi Pietro Beretta). The visit was organized with the valuable support of the Central Directorate of Criminal Police of Italy.

The participants had the opportunity to learn and exchange ideas with regard to the implementation of the new EU Regulation on the deactivation of firearms, the standards and procedures to be followed, the role of the national entities in charge of the various stages of deactivation (authorization, realization, verification and certification), the particularities of licensing and record keeping, general and specific challenges, international cooperation in the field, a/o.
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