



**Regional Conference of Ministers of Justice and Ministers of Interior
of South-East Europe**

**‘Strengthening Co-operation in Fight against Organized Crime
in South East Europe’**

Budva, 16-18 March 2011

**Speech by Hido Biscevic, Secretary General,
Regional Cooperation Council**

Mr. Chairman, dear Ministers, Excellencies,

I am honoured to be here today and I want to express gratitude to the Montenegrin South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECPP) Chairmanship-in-Office for organizing our meeting at the time when the area of justice and home affairs is gaining importance in light of European commitments and aspirations of our countries.

At the outset, let me state the simple and obvious fact – we are all very much aware that *rule of law* is crucial for sustainable economic development, good governance, social stability and respect for fundamental rights. We all recognise this and we all strive in bringing sustained improvements to the *rule of law*.

At the same time, despite notable progress, there are still many challenges that need to be tackled. While security and political stability have greatly improved in the past decade, South East Europe is still vulnerable to various forms of trans-national organized crime, corruption and terrorism. If one could say that cyber crime is a new threat to our region, human trafficking, smuggling of migrants, drug trafficking and money laundering are not. Curbing these criminal activities require a consolidated regional cooperation and robust institutional capacities able to effectively deliver.

In this light, it is evident that the region needs a genuine enhancement of regional cooperation, as an additional charge that would further enhance positive trends.

Given the current economic crisis and multiple negative social effects, it goes without saying that every segment of justice and home affairs is directly involved with creating an environment conducive to the much needed improvement, recovery and economic and social development, be it a notion of good governance or fight against corruption and organized crime.

From that point of view, I believe that the Regional Strategic Document on Justice and Home Affairs, prepared for the endorsement, is of crucial importance for our countries, creating a unique platform to address pressing issues in this priority area, thus providing us with adequate tools to ensure European standards when it comes to law enforcement and judicial cooperation.

The Regional Strategic Document envisages equally detailed and comprehensive approach to tackling all justice and home affairs priorities for action in organised crime, anticorruption, migration, asylum and refugee issues, fundamental rights and cooperation in civil matters, including, among others issues, a special attention to the child protection.

None of these issues can be dealt only at the national level and within the individual boundaries only.

The strategic document has been developed in order to provide better integration, more coherence and transparency. By enhancing regional cooperation, the RSD aims to harmonise legislation and practices with the EU requirements but also to best suit the region's specific needs.

The work on the document started almost two years ago and at that time some of the enlisted priorities were in some sense doubtful, like migration for example. However, in this point, the current situation shows that it was important to include this aspect into the document, as recent developments in North Africa and irregular migration flows from Asia more than justified this strategic choice, again pointing out that fight against trans-national phenomenon cannot be won within the national borders.

It is important to have an efficient mechanism for coordination at strategic and operational level. Law enforcement authorities must have the ability to work effectively across borders and share their jurisdiction mandates. The exchange of information on concrete cases, but also on criminological aspects (e.g. new *modus operandi*, assessments of criminal phenomenon) is critical for preventing and combating crime in the region.

It is encouraging to note that this process is gaining momentum.

Using this momentum, it is now crucial to improve *operational capacities* between law enforcement and judicial authorities within the region, and between the region and EU, making full use of the existing regional instruments, framework and networks.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Regional Strategic Document (RSD) on Justice and Home Affairs 2011-2013, developed by the Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat together with various stakeholders from the region, is designed to streamline and coordinate regional activities, to provide a synthetic guidance on all existing programmes or plans focusing on South East Europe, and to help harmonize donor activities, avoiding overlapping and duplication.

For the first time, our region will have a common platform to address the challenges in the area of justice and home affairs, with clear benchmarks to measure the level of the cooperation in the implementation process. The Steering Group on Regional Strategy, set up

as the monitoring body is going to take stock of existing activities at the regional level in the area of justice, home affairs and security cooperation. The results of the evaluation will help us understand what works and what does not work, essentially driving the process in the right direction. I would appreciate should you soon assign the specialists who will work together with their colleagues from the region on the assessment and the reports on the implementation of the Regional Strategic Document. We are planning to have two meetings of the Steering Group per year, in order to evaluate and prepare reports on the implementation process and these will be submitted to SEECF and other interested partners.

At the same time, the annexes to the Strategic Document will be constantly updated by the Steering Group in order to reflect the current situation. The RCC Secretariat will continue to ensure overall coordination, while leaving the day-to-day business to those who have the mandates for it.

The impact of the Regional Strategic Document will be judged by the improvement it will make to the lives of ordinary citizens who are paying the price of criminal activities that the strategy is attempting to address.

When fully implemented, the strategy will provide us with effective tools to stave off the multitude of challenges that continue to haunt the region, by working together and by sharing and combining national judicial and law enforcement authorities.

Cooperating on the regional level, and with our EU and international partners, I am convinced we can contribute to further ensure full application of the rule of law on any individual national basis.

Thank you for your kind attention.