



*The Romanian Chairmanship-in-office
of the South East European Co-operation Process*



the voice of the region

Declaration

Issued at the Meeting of the Defense Ministers of South-East European Countries held in Bucharest on 31 March 2005

1. We, the Defense Ministers of the participating countries and the observer country in the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), met in Bucharest on 31 March 2005 within the framework of the SEECP, to follow-up on the process of sectorial cooperation amongst our countries in the field of defense, initiated at the Sarajevo Meeting of Defense Ministers on 15 April 2004.
2. Present at the meeting were H.E. Mr. Vecdi GONUL, Minister of Defense; H.E. Mr. Pandeli MAJKO, Minister of Defense; H.E. Mr. Nikola RADOVANOVIC, Minister of Defense; Mr. Ilko Dimitrov DIMITROV, Deputy Minister of Defense; Mr. Vuksin MARAS, State Secretary; Mr. Mate RABOTEG, State Secretary; Mr. Ion-Mircea PLANGU, State Secretary; H.E. Mr. Athanasios DENDOULIS, Ambassador to Romania, representing H.E. Mr. Spilios SPILIOTOPOULOS, Minister of Defense; Mrs. Magdalena NESTOROVSKA, State Advisor, representing H.E. Mr. Jovan MANASIJEVSKI, Minister of Defense; and as observer H.E. Mr. Valeriu PLESCA, Minister of Defense.
3. We have underlined that the process of NATO and EU enlargement substantially improves the security environment in the SEE region. We have emphasised the importance of the NATO Partnership for Peace Programme and Membership Action Plan and the Stabilisation and Association Process as the central and most valuable instruments to assist the region in achieving and maintaining both stability and security.
4. We have taken note of the specific questions and recommendations raised at the High-level Expert meeting on 30 March 2005, where representatives from different international partners and various International Financial Institutions were present.
5. Reaffirming our commitment to enhance cooperation and dialogue in SEE and also with international partners on specific defense conversion related processes, we have exchanged views on three principal components of defense conversion: resettlement of redundant military personnel, conversion of former military bases, and of restructuring military industry by conversion of redundant military facilities to civilian purposes.
6. We have emphasized that the challenges associated with defense conversion are an integral part of overall Security Sector Reform in countries concerned. Defense

and Security Sector Reform remains a key component for some countries to move closer towards the EU and NATO.

7. At the same time we are fully aware that Defense and Security Sector Reform, including defense conversion, represents a crucial dimension of much wider transformation processes, so it has to be dealt within the context of overall socio-economic development, reconstruction and social development policies.
8. We have recognized that most of the SEECP participating countries face similar circumstances and challenges in dealing with the economic and social costs of restructuring and downsizing of their armed forces resulting in base closures, relocations of military units, re-integration of surplus military personnel and destruction or selling surplus equipment and weapons.
9. Enhanced regional cooperation should focus on sharing information regarding relevant national policies and programmes, on sharing lessons learnt and expertise acquired, on seeking improved access to international expertise and assistance for project development and implementation, and finally, on seeking improved access to international project funding from international and private sources. Therefore, these countries would benefit from having access to a shared pool of knowledge and experience.
10. We have taken note of the progress, which has in particular been made under the resettlement and military sites conversion programmes in some SEECP countries launched by the NATO Defense and Security Economic Directorate with the support of the Stability Pact.
11. We have acknowledged the existence of all the programmes and projects run by the international organizations and bilateral partners in the field of defense conversion in SEE region, and have expressed the need for further assistance from the international partners in some specific areas.
12. We have agreed that we should build on and use existing capacities of the Zagreb-based Regional Arms Control Verification and Implementation Assistance Centre (RACVIAC) to develop regional support networks, concentrate know-how on defense conversion and promote an integrated donors approach.
13. We took note of the ongoing discussions in the framework of the Multinational Advisory Group on the legal basis and the multilateral character of RACVIAC.
14. We have noted that there is a need for increased regional cooperation on destruction of redundant stockpiles of major conventional weapon systems, including Small Arms and Light Weapons and stock of redundant ammunition/explosives, while taking into account environmental implications. The South Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) possesses relevant knowledge and expertise in the field of combating the threat of uncontrolled and excess SALW in the SEE region.

II.

We agreed on the following measures:

1. To exchange information on defense conversion programs amongst the Defense Ministries of countries concerned in order to create more transparency regarding progress, and to establish more clearly needs for technical and financial support. We request the Romanian Chairmanship-in-Office to initiate through RACVIAC collecting of such information through a questionnaire to be circulated by the latter, and we request RACVIAC to produce a report on the answers received.
2. To share experiences on national defense conversion processes with regional and international partners in order to facilitate identification of areas for cooperation amongst ourselves and with international partners. Accordingly, we request RACVIAC and international actors to establish three working groups: the first bringing together national and international experts on resettlement of former military personnel; the second composed of experts on the conversion of former military sites and facilities; the third on restructuring and/or downsizing redundant military industries into civilian ones. The experts in the working groups should represent relevant national ministries, international organizations with technical and managerial know-how, and international financial institutions.
3. To encourage RACVIAC to strengthen its role as a regional centre for defense conversion by serving as a clearing house for relevant information and reports, by hosting workshops, seminars and conferences to share experience and to transfer expertise on specific conversion aspects, and by promoting the creation of networks among regional and international partners interested in practical cooperation on conversion programs.

We recommend the RACVIAC Member States to consider making available the resources needed for such a strengthened regional role.

4. To develop national programs for the destruction of surplus military weapons and ammunition, with international technical and financial support. We request the South Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) to provide its technical and managerial know-how on weapons destruction programs with international support and closely cooperate with RACVIAC in this regard.

STATEMENT

OF THE BULGARIAN DELEGATION

We believe that the process of Defense Reforms and the Defense Conversion being part of them are of utmost importance for the SEE Region. The Republic of Bulgaria states its commitment to the process and readiness to contribute by all means available.

We are ready to work in this sphere with all international and regional institutions as well as on bilateral and multilateral basis. We express the willingness to work with RACVIAC in the domain of Defense Conversion.

Our firm believe is that the further development of RACVIAC as a regional center for Defense conversion in the region shall be preceded by the development and

approval by the countries participating in MAG – RACVIAC of all the necessary new framework documents.

Više detalja na web stranici:www.mae.ro/seecp/main16.html