



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 23 November 2006

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**JAI 612
ENFOPOL 199
EUROPOL 97**

"I/A" ITEM NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Article 36 Committee
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Subject : Draft Council Conclusions on the further development of the SECI Center

Delegations will find in Annex draft Council Conclusions on the further development of the SECI Center.

The Article 36 Committee reached agreement on the draft Council Conclusions at its meeting of 22 November 2006.

On this basis COREPER is requested to invite the Council to approve the draft Council Conclusions on the further development of the SECI Center set out in Annex.

Council Conclusions on the further development of the SECI Center

The Council of the European Union:

1. Recognising the serious dimension of organised crime originating from or linked to South East Europe, which is endangering long-term political, economical and social development in the region and undermining the concept of rule of law;
2. Welcomes the *South East European Cooperation Initiative Center for Combating Transborder Crime* (SECI Center), which, along with other initiatives, plays an important role in strengthening regional cooperation in fighting organised crime;
3. Considers the SECI Center as an important regional contribution to the security of the European Union as a whole and thanks SECI Center's the current facilitators, in particular the transatlantic partners, for the support they have given so far;
4. Stresses that these initiatives must not duplicate existing mechanisms within the European Union, such as Europol, or other initiatives in the region;
5. Welcomes the fact that the SECI Member States are considering the development of the SECI Center as an organisation cooperating in close association with Europol and underlines the importance of close cooperation between the SECI Center and Europol as recommended in the *Action Oriented Paper on Improving Cooperation, on Organised Crime, Corruption, Illegal Immigration and Counter-terrorism, between the EU, Western Balkans and relevant ENP countries* and endorses Europol's continued support for the SECI Center;
6. In line with the European Commission Assessment of the SECI Regional Center for Combating Trans-Border Crime, welcomes the intention of the SECI Center Member States to develop a new legal basis for the SECI Center which is a basic requirement for a full cooperation between the SECI Center and Europol.

7. Underlines that the compatibility of membership of both the European Union and of the SECI Center requires an institutional and operational link between Europol and SECI Center which takes into account the driving role of Europol as the EU body for the fight against organised crime, this should be reflected in the legal framework of the SECI Center so as to avoid any duplication of roles and tasks.
8. Encourages the SECI Member States to participate actively in the work on the future of the SECI Center.
9. Endorses the creation of the “SECI Center Support Group” to assist the SECI Member States in creating a new legal framework to strengthen and further develop the SECI Center and invites the Member States, the European Commission and Europol to support this endeavour in an appropriate manner.
10. Invites the European Commission to examine possibilities for financial support for specific projects of the SECI Center in accordance with the procedures of the CARDS programme and of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance under the new Financial Perspective as of 1 January 2007, especially in order to enhance cooperation between South East European countries, facilitated by the SECI Center.
11. Considering the expected timeframe for entry into force of the new legal basis, the Council encourages the SECI Member States to adequately finance, fully make use of and further develop the existing structure of the SECI Center and support it in reaching its objective.
12. Calls upon the Presidency-in-office to present annually a report, drawn up in cooperation with the European Commission and Europol, on the cooperation of the EU Member States and the EU institutions and bodies concerned with the SECI Center, and to keep the Council informed on the further development of a new legal framework for the SECI Center.

Reference documents:

1. The London Statement – Defeating Organised Crime in South Eastern Europe of 25 November 2002
2. Report by the Friends of the Presidency on concrete measures to be taken to effectively enhance the fight against organised crime originating from the Western Balkans of 13 October 2004
3. Council Conclusions on the Report of the Friends of Presidency on the fight against organised crime originating from or linked to the Western Balkans of 2 December 2004
4. Development of an EU strategy towards the Western Balkan region (11087/05)
5. Conclusions Statement of the EU-Troika and the Western Balkans - Third Meeting of the EU-Western Balkans Forum of 25 November 2005
6. Action Oriented Paper on Improving Cooperation on Organised Crime, Corruption, illegal Immigration and Counter-terrorism, between the EU, the Western Balkans and relevant ENP countries of 1 and 2 June 2006
7. SECI Center Joint Cooperation Committee’s Strategy of the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative Regional Center for Combating Transborder Crime 2005-2010
8. European Commission Assessment of the SECI Regional Center for Combating Trans-Border Crime