Seminar on Facilitation of Common and Coordinated Measures in the Western Balkan Region
4 – 7 February 2013,
Rakitje, Zagreb, Croatia

Activity Background
In 2012, the DCAF Border Security Programme has been transferred from Geneva to the permanent DCAF office in Ljubljana, Slovenia. In addition to some structural and organisational changes, the Programme has been transformed to make it more efficient and result-oriented. The Regional Action Plan 2012-2015 for Capacity Building and Increasing Common and Coordinated Measures in the Area of Border Security in the Western Balkan Region has been endorsed by the beneficiary countries from the Western Balkan region. It provides strategic and goal-oriented guidance to the endeavours by the beneficiaries, participating donor countries, DCAF and partner organisations, such as EU agencies.
Opening Session: Mr Branko Kromar (RACVIAC), Amb Branimir Mandić RACVIAC, Mr Anton Travner (DCAF), Mr Danijel Lorbek (MoI, SI), Brig Gen Joszef Bali (FRONTEX)

It consists of three main components – (1) "EU/Schengen Integration", (2) "Education and Training", and (3) "Common and Coordinated Measures in Crime Prevention, Fight against Organised Crime falling within the responsibility of Border Police Forces, and the Fight against Illegal Migration". The Programme is organized and financed by DCAF. In accordance with the Exchange of Letters between RACVIAC–Centre for Security Cooperation and DCAF Ljubljana, signed on 18th December 2012 in Rakitje, Croatia, altogether four events within the DCAF Programme will be executed in cooperation between DCAF Ljubljana and RACVIAC, which will be hosting the events.

Activity Facilitators

The Seminar was planned, organized and executed as a joint event by DCAF Ljubljana and RACVIAC – Centre for Security Cooperation. According to the Exchange of Letters, DCAF Ljubljana supported the Seminar financially and programme-wise, while RACVIAC hosted it.

Activity Venue, Duration and Participation

The main purpose of the Seminar was to bring together regional police experts, police practitioners as well as Slovenian, DCAF and EU experts in the area of border security and cross-border police cooperation to discuss further improvements when it comes to operational results, further needs and developments in education and training, and building mutual trust among regional security practitioners

The Seminar was held from 4–7 February 2013 in RACVIAC facilities and gathered 17 participants (Albania–2, Bosnia and Herzegovina–2, Croatia–1, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*–3, FRONTEX–2, Montenegro–2, Turkey–1, Serbia–2, and Slovenia–1.

Activity Description and Content

In the opening session, the first to welcome the audience was Ambassador Branimir Mandić, the Director of RACVIAC. He endorsed the idea of executing part of DCAF Border Security Programme in RACVIAC facilities in accordance with the Exchange of Letters between RACVIAC and DCAF Ljubljana, signed on 18th December 2012 in Rakitje, Croatia. At the end of his speech, Ambassador Mandić stressed the importance of the cooperation between RACVIAC and DCAF Ljubljana in their efforts to support South East European countries on their way to the EU integration in the area of border security.

Mr Anton Travner, Director of DCAF Ljubljana and Head of Border Security Programme, presented the renewed DCAF Border Security Programme and its three main components, as well as the 2013 Annual Plan, which was adopted by the regional Heads of Cabinets and Border Police Chiefs at their meeting in December 2012 in Belgrade, Serbia. At that meeting the Chiefs provided feedback from the beneficiary countries in reference to the 2012 results and achievements, as well as agreed objectives for the further implementation of the regional activities in
the field of common and coordinated measures.

Mr Daniel Lorbek, Leading Expert, Director of the Maribor Police Department, was the moderator of the following session. In his respective analysis and evaluation of the common and coordinated operations at several border crossing points between the Western Balkan countries carried out in 2012, he outlined the achievements and outcomes reached, but also the gaps and setbacks in the planning and realization. With the objective of raising operational results to a higher level and measuring performance within the operations in an objective manner, the reasons for the detected weaknesses were elaborated in detail. After a discussion involving representatives of all present countries, Frontex and DCAF staff, some measures were proposed aimed at bridging the identified gaps.

Mr Lorbek closed off his presentation concluding that in the course of previous common and coordinated operations planned objectives had been achieved and expected outcomes reached. By means of these activities some significant operational results have been achieved. They have at the same time served as a fruitful platform for further advancement of cross-border operational police cooperation at a regional level in the areas of crime prevention, fight against organized crime and illegal migration that fall under the responsibility of the border police. The positive results and outcomes contributed to the education and training, exchange of experiences and good practices, building of mutual trust and had a worthwhile impact on the general population. Thus, they demonstrated a strong political determination and a significant level of preparedness of the Western Balkan countries to cooperate with one another in, among others, the area of common and coordinated measures. The operations were widely covered by the Western Balkan countries’ press and media.

Throughout the Seminar, the representatives of participatory countries, i.e. regional experts, reviewed the results achieved, lessons learned, estimating the needs and opportunities and planning ahead the operational measures to be conducted in 2013 based on regional needs and risk analyses. In the course of their analysis, special attention was paid to finding solutions for the identified problems faced by the countries and their border police services, while adequate measures for overcoming these problems were proposed.

The general conclusion was that the common and coordinated operations in 2013 should be organized generally in the same way as in 2012. The improvements to be made are to be elaborated in the operational plans which will be prepared in the course of planning and implementation of each separate common and coordinated operation.

It was also concluded that the DCAF Working Group on Legal Reform should continue looking into possibilities of creating a more efficient regional framework for readmission and return, by finding the most appropriate legal solution, possibly a regional Memorandum of Understanding, in order to enable a region-wide mechanism for organizing common return flights for irregular migrants to the countries of origin. Participants also
discussed significant EU initiatives in this field.

The most immediate expected outcome of the common and coordinated measures is the accomplishment of positive operational results in crime prevention and fight against cross-border crime falling under the responsibility of the border police, the sharing of knowledge, experiences and best practices in the Western Balkan region, demonstrating strong willingness of the regional authorities actively engage in cross-border operational cooperation, strengthening regional and wider European security.

Compiled by:
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