

## **Bulgarian Chairmanship-in-office of the Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast Europe**

**(1 January – 30 June 2010)**

The Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast Europe (PCC SEE) was signed on 5 May 2006 by Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia, and entered into force on 11 July 2008 after concluding the relevant internal procedures in the Contracting Parties (CPs). Bulgaria ratified PCC SEE on 25 September 2008 and it entered into force for the country on 1 March 2009.

PCC SEE envisages modern forms of cooperation, such as joint threat analysis; liaison officers; witness protection; hot pursuit; cross-border surveillance; controlled deliveries; undercover investigations; transmission and comparison of DNA profiles and other identification material; technical measures for facilitating transborder cooperation; border search operations; mixed analysis working groups; joint investigation teams; mixed patrols along the state border; cooperation in common centres.

Bulgaria considers its accession to PCC SEE as a chance to contribute to the realisation of the European perspective of the region and as an additional opportunity to assist its partners from the Western Balkans and Moldova in the process of their preparation for EU integration.

The impetus given by PCC SEE for active cooperation and the use of modern forms of interaction between the law enforcement authorities, in order to achieve high security standards in all SEE countries with regard to the enlargement of the single European space of freedom, security and justice, is of extreme importance.

### *Priorities of the Bulgarian Chairmanship-in-Office*

As the first official Chair of PCC SEE\* Bulgaria was strongly motivated to introduce European principles and standards – transparency, flexibility, and necessary compromises in the performance of the rotation chairmanship, both at the expert and the political level.

The main aim of the Bulgarian Chairmanship-in-office was to contribute to the practical implementation of PCC SEE, to the introduction of modern forms and methods of cooperation in all CPs thus achieving a qualitatively new level of police interaction in the region in accordance with the best EU practices.

In order to achieve this aim Bulgaria set out the following priorities:

- Foster the process of practical implementation of the different aspects of PCC SEE, both through encouraging the CPs to speed-up the process of signing implementation agreements and through supporting the mutual evaluation missions in the field of data protection;
- Contribute to the introduction of harmonised training on Convention related matters;
- Explore opportunities for EU financing for the activities under the Convention;
- Organise the Third meeting of the Committee of Ministers.

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\* The decision on the introduction of Chairmanships for six-month periods on a rotation base was taken by PCC SEE Committee of Ministers at its meeting on 17 November 2009 in Brussels. The rotation follows the alphabetical order of the countries, but Bulgaria was the first official chair, as Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina were not included in the first rotation circle.

### *Bilateral and Multilateral Implementation Agreements*

During its chairmanship-in-office Bulgaria had negotiations and consultations with other CPs (BiH, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia) and prepared several draft implementation agreements. As a result in the period 26 April – 20 May two new agreements were signed with Serbia – on establishment and functioning of PCCC at Kalotina and general agreement on police cooperation replacing the existing bilateral memorandum of 2003 and widening its scope with forms of cooperation provided for in PCC SEE. At the final stage of preparation for signing are also agreement with BiH on protection of classified information, agreement with Macedonia on mixed patrols along the state border and a new agreement with Montenegro on police cooperation. The agreements are expected to be signed till the end of this year.

### *Mutual Evaluation Missions in the Field of Data Protection*

Bulgaria paid great attention to the support of the mutual evaluation missions in the field of data protection, considering the fact that the results from these evaluations are preconditions for the successful implementation of PCC SEE in general. The exchange of information and the practical implementation of most of the forms of cooperation envisaged in PCC SEE can start only after these evaluation missions have completed successfully and all CPs have transposed and implemented at national level the provisions of Art.31, Para 1 and 2 of PCC SEE.

Following a decision of the Committee of Ministers from 17 November 2009, in February 2010 the Bulgarian chairmanship and the PCC SEE Secretariat organised jointly the first meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Data Protection within PCC SEE. Along with representatives of CPs, international partners as Germany, Slovenia, Europol and DCAF took part in the meeting. The specific tasks of the Ad hoc WG and the procedure for the evaluations in the framework of PCC SEE were discussed, and the relevant European legal framework in the area of data protection and the procedures for the Schengen evaluations and self-evaluations were presented.

CPs nominated their national experts in the field of data protection and an evaluation team was composed. At the meeting of the Committee of Ministers on 21 May 2010 Albania announced its readiness to be the first evaluated country and to submit its statement of readiness officially in the following days. The Bulgarian Chairmanship is ready to organise this first evaluation mission in June 2010.

### *Harmonised Training on Convention Related Matters*

In April 2010 the Bulgarian chairmanship organised a meeting of representatives of the police education and training institutions of CPs, together with representatives of international partners as Austria, CEPOL, Europol, Frontex, SECI Center, EAPC. The meeting gave opportunity of the practitioners in the field of education and training to exchange views and to outline the possibilities for the particular incorporation of the Convention related matters in the curricula and relevant syllabi of the police education and training institutions of CPs.

As a result of the discussions, on 19 May 2010 the Expert Working Group under Art.33 of PCC SEE took a decision to establish a thematic working group on education and training.

At its meeting on 21 May 2010 the Committee of Ministers endorsed a Strategy Paper on Conducting Harmonised Training, prepared by PCC SEE Secretariat and agreed upon by the experts of CPs. The document will serve as guideline for the thematic working group in its task to draft a harmonised curriculum on Convention related matters; including syllabi on the different topics (cross-border surveillance, controlled delivery, undercover investigations to prevent and to investigate crimes, joint investigation teams, data protection, procedure of exchange of data and information, technical measures for facilitating trans-border cooperation, cooperation in common centres, joint threat analysis, mixed patrols, witness protection, hot pursuit, police programmes for preventive operations, liaison officers).

### *Third Meeting of the Committee of Ministers*

The concluding event of the Bulgarian chairmanship-in-office was the Third meeting of the Committee of Ministers of PCC SEE, held on 20-21 May 2010 in Sofia. The meeting gathered the respective Ministers of CPs (with the exception of Albania which was represented by a Deputy Minister), the PCC SEE Secretariat and representatives of the international partners and donors to PCC SEE (DCAF, Austria, Slovenia, Switzerland, Europol, CEPOL, the General Secretariat to the Council of EU, SECI Center, SEPCA).

During the first session of the meeting the Bulgarian Chairmanship, the other CPs and the PCC SEE Secretariat reviewed the achievements with regard to the implementation of the Convention in the different countries and in general, and discussed their visions on the possible further steps in order to make the Convention fully operational.

During the second session the Bulgarian Chairmanship initiated a discussion on PCC SEE as a modern instrument for exchange of information and efficient police cooperation in the region, proposing to focus on the “human dimension” of the law enforcement cooperation. The Ministers agreed to take particular steps for the establishment of direct contacts between the competent law enforcement structures with similar competences responsible for the implementation of each of the forms of cooperation provided for in PCC SEE, in order to identify the concrete partners, to build mutual trust and to reach efficient interaction.

A Memorandum of Understanding regarding the cooperation and support for the PCC SEE Secretariat was signed by the Ministers of CPs and the Director of DCAF in the framework of the meeting. The document reiterates the full commitment of CPs to an effective implementation process, including the allocation of necessary financial and human resources, and sets out the role and tasks of the Secretariat, institutionalising its activities performed since September 2008.

The third meeting of the Committee of Ministers also gave possibilities for bilateral meeting between the Ministers. The Bulgarian Minister of Interior had meetings with his colleagues from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia, and the Secretary General of the Bulgarian Ministry met with the Albanian delegation and the Director of the SECI Center. Different issues of mutual interest and particular proposals for the enhancement of the bilateral and regional operational cooperation were the focus of these meetings.