

Speech by Principal Deputy HR Larry Butler at the Third Annual Ministerial Review Conference

Lessons Learned from the Establishment of Border Security Systems

– Check against delivery –

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You have over the course of the last two days examined a broad range of issues related to the development of an efficient and cost-effective border security system in the Western Balkans. Allow me to extend my appreciation for your accomplishments in the face of enormous physical, financial and political challenges. Every citizen in the region benefits from your efforts and should be grateful. I certainly am.

This evening you honor me with the opportunity to focus on the complicated, overarching *political* context in which the varied and interrelated initiatives in this field are being undertaken.

It's important to highlight the fact that there *is* an overarching political context.

Border security is not – and can never be viewed as – a *technical* issue. The degree to which border security can be maintained and enhanced is determined by complex and constantly changing political considerations.

Crucially, the whole question of border security in the Western Balkans can be placed in a *positive* political context.

The object is to *expand* freedom not to restrict it.

The object is to maintain a regional border security system that protects the interests of citizens.

At its most basic this involves making sure that criminals cannot take advantage of porous borders, and at the same time making sure that citizens enjoy the maximum possible freedom of movement – among countries in the region and between the region and the wider world, including the European Union.

As border security systems are improved, citizens will be able to move in and out of the region with *more* freedom not *less* freedom.

As border security systems are improved, citizens will enjoy more effective protection from the criminal networks that currently make use of inadequate border supervision to engage in trafficking, smuggling, money-laundering, tax-evasion and other forms of crime and corruption that undermine the social, economic and physical wellbeing of citizens.

So, there are compelling reasons for making the creation and maintenance of adequate border security a political priority.

There is also an overarching context that makes the creation and maintenance of adequate border security politically *feasible*. This is the common aspiration of every country in the region to secure full integration with the EU. The common aspiration of every citizen is visa-free access to the EU. This cannot happen without you being successful.

This common aspiration provides a powerful incentive – and at the same time it provides invaluable *tools* that can be used to turn this incentive into forward momentum.

The development of border security systems in the Western Balkans is now a well-established process; the Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) began its

activities in this field in November 2001, with the creation of an International Advisory Board (IAB) for border security and the launch of a series of interactive workshops. Since then, considerable progress has been made in forging a consensus on how best to establish a successful border security system through international alliances, and in developing strategic thinking on border security.

Four key principles underpin an effective regional border security system:

First, there must be an efficient, properly functioning and autonomous governmental organization with a clear command and control system and with the skills and capability necessary to raise readiness levels and concentrate forces at critical locations – BiH has established such an organization, the State Border Service, and the SBS is now fully operational.

Secondly, there must be an electronic and visual observation network covering maritime, river and land borders integrated in a uniform control system with passport checkpoints and border guard sectors. BiH cannot yet claim to maintain 100 percent border coverage, due to limitations in resources and challenges of geography, particularly in the maritime sector. This is an area where international donors could effect a significant and rapid operational improvement.

Thirdly, there must be uniform basic training for all forces responsible for border control tasks. As part of BiH's current effort to integrate all of the agencies and functions related to border security within a single system, training and operating methods are being harmonized. This effort, which will help ensure maximum inter-agency cooperation, is being undertaken together with BiH's international partners.

Finally, each country must have legally guaranteed and regulated criminal intelligence and investigation capacity. Bosnia and Herzegovina has already established the legal

framework for its border supervision regime and through the interrelated activities of SIPA, OSA and the SBS it is applying this legal framework at the operational level.

All of these initiatives are reflected to a greater or lesser extent in steps being taken by neighbouring countries. In this respect it's important to state clearly that we should *not* try to reinvent the wheel.

The template of effective border security already exists, in the institutional and operational structures that have evolved among the EU member countries. The West Balkan states therefore have a logical way forward. They can model their national strategies on harmonizing their border security efforts with European best practices.

This template has already enabled the governments in the region to make very substantial progress. Let no one understate how far we have come, compared to the situation as little as three or four years ago.

In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina let me recap – because the progress has been impressive, of which the member states of the European Union should take positive note:

- We have a fully functioning State Border Service.
- We have developed a fully computerised system of control and issuance of visas to foreign citizens travelling in BiH, at border crossings. This has required a major and sustained administrative, financial and political effort. This effort has succeeded because it has been clear to all stakeholders that securing the country's document management represents a major step forward in state building and in integrating BiH in European structures.
- Currently, 14 border crossings are part of an integrated IT document management system. By the end of this year, all 53 international border crossing will have been

connected to this system, which enables full communication among all border crossings and competent institutions.

Taken together, these measures are helping to ensure full coordination among all competent agencies working on or around borders in BiH, in line with best European practice.

So, a great deal has been done – but let's be clear: we still have a long way to go.

At the regional level, we are agreed on the way forward and we have identified some of the key legal and institutional steps that have to be taken in order to move along this path.

But agreeing on a strategy is not the same as implementing it.

The Western Balkans today remains an area where border security is far from adequate and where – as a direct result of this inadequacy – criminal activities that depend on and exploit lax border controls are endemic and pernicious.

This has to be changed, and it has to be changed as a matter of the utmost urgency.

I am pleased that DCAF has at this conference reiterated its willingness to play a major role in the facilitation of implementing measures laid out in the various countries' strategy plans and in providing expert advice through its International Advisory Board.

In line with the work done over the past 24 months, and the contents of the strategy plans presented in Brussels in April 2003, DCAF has elaborated a concrete plan of activities for 2006 and 2007, which it believes can help the Western Balkan countries achieve the goal of enhancing efficient regional cooperation of border security systems.

These activities include:

- Agreed regular meetings of leaders at all levels
- National contact points
- A desk officers' network that can play a key liaison role
- Common information management at the regional level
- Common patrols
- Joint risk analysis
- An ad hoc centre for common operations
- Joint or coordinated investigations; and
- Coordination of education and training programs

DCAF proposes that its International Advisory Board form the basis for a wider international consortium, bringing together a variety of international actors in the field of border security. This consortium will make it possible to coordinate the various activities in the region. Moreover, its regional approach, by bringing together leaders of border security in the region, will:

- Encourage an exchange of information and the sharing of experiences, so that more open working practices and greater operational transparency can be achieved
- Help foster greater trust through this process and by promoting a proactive and creative approach to developing solutions to border security problems, by spreading awareness of other national strategies, and thus making possible the planning of common activities; and
- Pool the knowledge of European experts, thus allowing the countries in the region to choose strategies that best suit their needs, and thus encouraging them to take responsibility for choices made in the reform process.

As I said at the beginning, this is in the final analysis not an exclusively technical process. It is a *political* one. What is now perfectly clear is that the citizens of the Western Balkans understand the importance of border security – as a means of safeguarding their own wellbeing and as a means of

expanding their capacity to travel conveniently beyond the region. The political leadership must respond to this popular awareness and live up to the legitimate expectations of their people. They can do so by moving forward with the practical steps that have been discussed in detail at this conference.

Thank you