

Prosecutors of the Western Balkans to strengthen their co-operation in the fight against organised crime and other forms of serious crime

Strasbourg, 27 January 2010

On 25 January, the Public Prosecutors of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” signed in Rome the amended Memorandum of Understanding for Regional Co-operation against Organised Crime and Other Forms of Serious Crime.

The initial memorandum was signed on 30 March 2005 in Skopje and marked the establishment of the Prosecutors’ Network with the aim to strengthen and to ensure direct and swift co-operation between prosecution services of the six countries in investigating and prosecuting cross-border crime. The Prosecutors Network is supported by the European Commission and the Council of Europe through a project implemented by the latter in partnership with the Ministry of Justice of Italy.

The revised Memorandum is a step further in strengthening this co-operation. First and foremost, it broadens the scope of prosecutorial co-operation by including other forms of serious crime. The new text of the Memorandum also aims at making direct contacts between the prosecution services of the six countries easier and faster; it is expected to have a positive impact on the day-to-day cooperation between them. Furthermore, it includes explicit references to the relevant European legal instruments in the field, thus promoting the establishment of a common terminology and standards and facilitating the process of harmonisation of national legislation on criminal procedure.

When speaking at the ceremony, the Public Prosecutors expressed confidence that the revised Memorandum will give an additional impetus to the co-operation that is already in place. Being a valuable tool in itself, the Memorandum has stimulated the conclusion of specific and detailed bilateral agreements between the prosecution services of the countries of Western Balkans. The number of cases investigated and prosecuted in co-operation between them increased over the past years. However, their individual capacity to respond to transnational crime remains limited, and therefore networking is paramount when facing the challenge to security and stability this crime represents.

The prosecutors also pointed out that the usual mechanisms of mutual legal assistance as foreseen in the relevant international treaties are often slow and complicated; practical arrangements such as the Memorandum are indispensable, as one has to act fast when investigating or trying to stop serious crime. They reiterated their commitment to continue to work together in the framework of the Prosecutors’ Network when investigating and prosecuting organised crime and all other forms of serious crime.

For more information please visit us at: www.coe.int/proseco