



INTRODUCTION

This report covers the period from June to November 2006. The aim of this report is to inform participants at the Stability Pact Working Table III meeting in Bucharest on 15 November 2006 on the activities of MARRI since the last meeting in Belgrade.

Over the past period the MARRI Regional Centre has increasingly focused its attention on migration issues, in light of the fact that the MARRI Member States have agreed on certain priorities and taking into consideration both national concerns as well as European and international commitments undertaken by the governments of the region.

In that respect, the MARRI Regional Centre welcomes the stand of the Finnish EU presidency, whereas Southeast Europe and countries' EU integration remains one of its priorities during their mandate. As set out by previous commitments (London Conference, Thessaloniki Summit, SAP process, European Partnerships, Ohrid Border process, 3rd Western Balkan Forum) and in order to start implementing the JHA-RELEX Strategy (adopted in December 2005) the EU is developing further its co-operation with the countries of the Western Balkans during 2006 to enable them to reach concrete results in all JHA fields. During the Finnish Presidency, the EU is working on adoption of the mandates for visa facilitation and readmission agreements with the countries of the Western Balkans and at concluding the negotiations, as appropriate, on case-by-case basis.

More specifically, the MARRI Regional Centre has carried out workshops and meetings in accordance with the approved MARRI Strategy and Programme of Action 2006 and 2007 (SPoA 2006-2007). Detailed information regarding each event that took place during the reporting period can be found at the official MARRI website available at www.marri-rc.org. As far as the MARRI events, those were attended by representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Ministries of Interior and other relevant ministries and bodies from MARRI Member States, regional and international experts, NGOs, academia and representatives from international organisations in order to jointly discuss further steps towards the fulfillment of key MARRI objectives.

Bosnia and Herzegovina currently holds the one-year Presidency of the MARRI Regional Forum, which started at the MARRI Ministerial Regional Forum held in Belgrade on 7 April 2006. In the meantime, Serbia has succeeded Serbia and Montenegro as a MARRI Member State, while Montenegro joined the MARRI Regional Forum as of 2 October 2006. All MARRI Member States have expressed its approval and support for Montenegro to become a sixth member of MARRI initiative.

The past achievements of the MARRI initiative in the last six months and its on-going efforts to meet future challenges would not have been possible without continuous support of its donors, namely the governments of Germany, UK, Sweden, Norway and USA, as well as all six MARRI Member States.

MARRI ACTIVITIES FROM APRIL TO NOVEMBER 2006

Please note that this Progress Report is covering the period between June and November 2006 and as such is not an exhaustive list of activities. It aims at highlighting the key events and achievements, as well as at pointing out the strategic challenges for MARRI initiative and its Regional Centre.

During the reporting period, MARRI has reached a high level visibility within the organisations and the countries in the region and established itself as an important factor in the region. The Director of MARRI Regional Centre, Mrs. Alenka Prvinšek, met with high-ranking officials from countries in the region, various experts, national authorities, representatives of the European Commission and initiated further information exchanges and discussions on MARRI. She established the contacts with number of embassies in Skopje, with an aim to present MARRI activities, discuss its priorities and explore areas of future engagement. Additionally, several ambassadors accredited to Skopje as well as officials from international organisations and institutions visited the MARRI Regional Centre. The Director participated within a series of international conferences, bilateral meetings, roundtables and press conferences aiming to ensure a regional dissemination of the recent developments within the MARRI framework; as for the next six months the activities of the MARRI Regional Centre shall be primarily oriented towards the implementation of its priorities through concrete projects with the partners from EU and other interested countries.

The MARRI Regional Centre continues the established co-operation with partner organisations on the regional level and the members of MARRI Regional Centre participate in activities in the region on MARRI related issues. The broad cooperation and coordination with international agencies and other related initiatives has been enhanced during the reporting period. In general, information on future plans and programme activities has been exchanged with the European Commission, EAR, EUROPOL, ICMPD, IOM, OSCE, RACVIAC, SECI, the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, UNHCR, UNMIK, USAID and others, exploring the possibilities for closer cooperation.

In line with its mandate, below are some of the major activities organised by the MARRI Regional Centre in the period between June and November 2006:

Workshop on Implementation of Readmission Agreements, Skopje, 15-16 June 2006

The MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje organised a Workshop on Technical Aspects of Implementation of Readmission Agreements in Skopje on 15-16 June 2006. The objective of the workshop was to identify the gaps and needs of the MARRI Member States' institutions involved in managing technical aspects of implementation of readmission agreements and to enhance regional co-operation mechanisms in accordance with international standards. The Workshop gathered officials and experts from MARRI Member States (the participants from Croatia and Albania did not attend the workshop) and representatives of international organisations (ICMPD, IOM, OSCE, Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, UNHCR and UNMIK), while the German Federal Government helped the event by financing its organisation.

Workshop on Management of Irregular Transit Migration, Sarajevo, 29-30 June 2006

The MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje, together with Budapest Process and in cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry of Foreign Affairs, organised a Workshop on Management of Irregular Transit Migration in the MARRI Region in Sarajevo on 29-30 June 2006. The mentioned Workshop provided an opportunity for the MARRI MS to identify the needs and gaps in regional cooperation in the field of combating irregular transit migration. This gathering provided a good opportunity to increase the co-operation between policy makers and law

enforcement agencies, with the involvement of international organisations. One of the outcomes of the workshop was to organise joint meeting with South East Europe Working Group of Budapest Process and MARRI in 2007, aiming to bring together on one hand the migration policy makers from MARRI states (participants from Albania did not attend the Workshop) and interested EU Member States on the other one. In order to accomplish challenges in this area the MARRI Regional Centre already established a Working Group on Irregular Migration with two subgroups, one assigned to deal with trafficking in human beings and the other with document security. The main task of this Working Group is to provide exchange of information and facilitate cooperation between the institutions in the region, its neighborhood and other interested states and organisations as well as to provide partnership in implementation of concrete projects related to document security and trafficking in human beings.

Diplomatic Briefing in the MARRI Regional Centre, Skopje, 12 September 2006

The Director of the MARRI Regional Centre, Mrs. Alenka Prvinšek, held a briefing for members of diplomatic core in Skopje on the premises of the Centre on 12 September 2006. The Director presented the priorities from the MARRI Strategy and Programme of Action for 2006 and 2007 in the fields of migration, asylum and return process, visa and consular cooperation and integrated border management, with an overview of MARRI Regional Centre's present and future activities. It has been emphasised that regional cooperation within the MARRI Regional Forum contributes to the alignment of national policies and to the development, stabilisation and improvement of the situation in the region as this cooperation reflects the extent to which the region is prepared for integration into EU structures.

1st Steering Group TRM Meeting, Skopje, 25 September 2006

The first Steering Group Meeting announcing the launch of the two-year Programme to Support the Development of Trans-national Referral Mechanisms (TRM) for Trafficked Persons in South-Eastern Europe was held at the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje. The meeting was addressed by Mrs. Gordana Jankulovska, Minister of Interior of the Republic of Macedonia, who expressed support for this joint effort to fight trafficking in persons in South Eastern Europe. The Programme to Support the Development of Trans-national Referral Mechanisms (TRM) for Trafficked Persons in South-Eastern Europe is funded by USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and implemented by ICMPD (International Centre for Migration Policy Development) in partnership with the Ministry of Interior of Bulgaria, the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje and ACTA (Network of NGOs against Human Trafficking and Corruption). The countries/territories participating in the programme are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and the UN-administered territory of Kosovo. The objective of the programme is to empower trafficked persons to restart a self-determined life, being aware of their rights and of the role they might play in criminal proceedings. For this purpose, mechanisms necessary for comprehensive trans-national victim support and institutionalized co-operation on trans-national cases between countries/actors in South Eastern Europe will be developed and implemented in the course of the programme. The meeting was concluded with the signature of co-operation agreements between ICMPD and the National Anti-trafficking Coordinators of the participating countries, who thus reassured their commitment to the implementation of this regional initiative against trafficking in persons.

Workshop on Migration Management Systems, Ulcinj, 5-6 October 2006

The MARRI Regional Centre and the Ministry of Interior of Montenegro organised a Workshop on Migration Management Systems in Ulcinj, Montenegro on 5-6 October 2006. This Workshop, which was financed by the German Federal Government, was opened by Mr. Jusuf Kalamperovic, Minister of Interior of the Republic of Montenegro. Aside from senior policy makers and national migration management experts from MARRI Member States (including Montenegro, the newest MARRI Member State), the participants included EU experts from

Portugal and Slovenia in order to present the practice of their states in setting up the system of migration management. This gathering provided an opportunity for MARRI Member States (participants from Croatia did not attend the Workshop) to present and discuss the country-specific migration management related questions. The participants have agreed on the need to develop a comprehensive, integrated migration management systems tailored to their specific needs. The task of these systems (covering immigration and emigration as well) is to provide answers to new forms of migration challenges. In particular, the participants discussed the importance of establishment/improvement of governmental agencies dealing with all areas of migration, as integrated systems in migration (regular and irregular), visa policy, border management, asylum, anti-trafficking, readmission and return policy need to incorporate coordination and cooperation on national levels of all stakeholders responsible for the development and execution of relevant regulatory framework.

MARRI Regional Forum, Mostar, 9 November 2006

The Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI) organised the first Regional Forum under the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency, which took place in Mostar on 9 November 2006. The MARRI Regional Forum provides an opportunity for MARRI MS' political directors to discuss current and future activities of MARRI in the framework of regional cooperation and regional ownership.

In addition, the MARRI Regional Centre has on its web site compiled answers to the Questionnaires on the topics of common interests to MARRI Member States:

- Overview of the organisational structures of national institutions managing migration
- Summary of concluded Readmission Agreements and institutions in charge of their implementation
- International agreements regulation labour migration
- Recent changes in legislation regulating migration
- Contact details for persons in national institutions regulating migration
- Diaspora (National institutions, statistics, legislation, organizations, associations, events, cooperation)

The Diaspora Questionnaire in October 2006 was based on the feedback from relevant national institutions on current state of affairs on the issue of diaspora in MARRI Member States (available in either English or respective language of MARRI Member State). MARRI attaches great attention to the issue of legal migration and, especially, to the question of diaspora. This is reflected in its Strategy and Programme of Action for 2006 and 2007, as well in the Belgrade Ministerial Declaration of April 2006. The potential of emigration from the MARRI region, their links with the families and communities in the country of origin is one of a great importance. This becomes even more important if we have in mind the impact of emigration on the social, economic, political and cultural milieu of the region. Therefore, the potentials of emigration movements from the MARRI region could be properly dealt with by the cooperation of institutions throughout the region.

Furthermore, as far as MARRI's promotion, a first issue of MARRI newsletter has been published in June 2006. The newsletter provides information on MARRI issues and indicates progress in MARRI related activities in the region. The newsletter, as well as frequent press releases, are distributed to more than thousand of e-mail addresses of governments, international organisations and other key players, stakeholders and donors in the region, European Union and worldwide. It is considered an excellent promotion tool of MARRI initiative. The feedback from recipients at all levels is very positive. As one additional method to increase its visibility, MARRI's intention is to publish a MARRI booklet which will cover the major topics, we are dealing with, together with lectures and outcomes on specific subjects. MARRI is planning to publish the booklet by the end of this year, after collecting all required content related material.

THE NEXT STEPS

In the upcoming period, the MARRI Regional Centre will primarily focus its activities on implementing the commitments of countries under the MARRI Strategy & Programme of Action for 2006-2007. The MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje, through realisation of specific projects, supports the implementation of national programs in further improving strategies and action plans that will result in increase of regional ownership and regional cooperation among relevant actors. In process of realisation of its SPoA 2006-2007, the MARRI Regional Centre, in cooperation with partner countries, organisations and agencies, ensures that programs and subsequent projects are fully in line with EU standards. It equally ensures that the approach taken is in line with the requirements needed in progressively closer association among countries and, at a later stage, accession to the European Union.

The MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje and Bosnia and Herzegovina MARRI Presidency invest special efforts in the process of further development of regional ownership principle. Bosnia and Herzegovina is assuming the role of active leader in committing MARRI Member States to increase their capacities and resume ownership and responsibility of decision-making within main MARRI areas of work. In the capacity of Presidency of the MARRI Regional Forum, Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- ✚ advances regional ownership and cooperation;
- ✚ emphasises the relevance of establishing and developing cooperation with other international organizations and initiatives in the region based on the principle of complementarity;
- ✚ increases cooperation between governmental agencies responsible for migration, asylum and refugees on regional and national level with an objective to develop good migration governance in the MARRI region;
- ✚ endorses development of capacity building in the fields of migration, asylum and refugees;
- ✚ supports activities related to follow up of CARDS Regional Project on Asylum, Migration and Visa in the Western Balkans;
- ✚ encourages MARRI Member States in the process of strengthening harmonisation of existing policies, synergising acquired knowledge, experiences and best practices on the road towards EU integration;
- ✚ assists the MARRI Regional Centre to implement the MARRI Strategy and Programme of Action 2006-2007, in particular with promotion of its activities;
- ✚ assists the MARRI Regional Centre in order to increase its visibility and strengthen its role as the voice of the region in MARRI fields.

More specifically, the focus will be given to the following projects of the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje in the upcoming period:

Workshop on Document Security and Establishment of Identity, Skopje, 23 - 24 November 2006

In accordance with MARRI Strategy and Programme of Action 2006/2007, the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje will organise a Workshop on Document Security and Establishment of Identity in Skopje on 23-24 November 2006. As stated in Recommendations from Workshop on Management on Irregular Transit Migration held in Sarajevo on 29-30 June 2006 adopted by participating national experts in order to enhance regional cooperation and information exchange mechanisms (on national legislation, policies and practices related to combating irregular migration, operational structures and methods of perpetrators, consular information, trafficking and smuggling of human beings, false documents, fraudulent invitation letters, fake travel agencies, etc) and promote the approximation of common standards.

The overall objectives of this workshop are the essential elements relevant for visa facilitation process, while the specific outcomes of this workshop should be amongst other:

- ✚ establish permanent regional working group tasked to deal with document security and establishment of identity;
- ✚ increase regional harmonisation of the standards related to document security and to improve intra-agency, inter-agency and inter-state cooperation through improved cooperation related to establishment of identity;
- ✚ identify gaps and develop solutions/recommendations for possible misuse of legal channels (obtaining of nationality, registration of birth or death in the country or abroad, by marriage, by adoption, recognition of fatherhood, lack of registration of birth in the countries in particular children born in foreign countries residing legally or illegally, problems related to multiple identities, identifying gaps regarding establishing and confirmation of identity of foreigners, applicants for visa, residence permits, naturalization, including questions related to the right on family reunification);
- ✚ identify best practices;
- ✚ elaborate follow-up strategies during the mentioned workshop.

The general outcome of the referred workshop is a project that should be carried out in 2007.

Furthermore, the future Workshop on Establishment of Co-operation between Academia and Governmental Institutions aims to create a specific approach towards awareness-raising transfer of practical experience on implementation of legislation on migration in practice to the students of law, journalism, social and political science. It is foreseen that the mentors from the faculty and the relevant ministries should monitor the results. The expected most valuable outcome would be the knowledge gained through this very specific co-operation and the interest of some of the students to continue their professional career dealing with migration. The end result of the project will be demonstrated on regional level, with further co-operation of the universities in the region and numerous other follow-ups, such as moot courts and other forms of competition.

In addition, the Workshop on Labour Migration shall be organised, as a follow up of the Workshop on Labour Migration for Integration/Development in Western Balkans held in Zagreb on 22-24 February 2006. It will be dedicated to the potential of return of retired economic emigrants to the region and the potential of their possible investment of remittances, as well as development. In the pipeline, the MARRI Regional Centre also envisages the organisation of the Workshop on Economic Migration in December 2006.

The MARRI Regional Centre strives in particular to strengthen relations with other organisations with significant presence in the region, such as the European Commission, other countries and international organisations involved in MARRI issues and main donor countries. In this respect, the MARRI Regional Centre holds MARRI briefing meetings with embassies and international organisations present in the region. Aside from mentioned September Skopje briefing, the upcoming MARRI briefing for diplomatic core and international organisations will take place in Tirana on 20 November 2006.

Within its fields of activity and through newly established or improved contacts with the relevant actors, the MARRI Regional Centre will continue to facilitate the commitment and active participation from national governments in and outside of the region, as this is essential to the success of MARRI. The MARRI Regional Centre shall ensure the political and strategic cohesion of the implementation of the MARRI Strategy and Programme of Action 2006-2007 and its specified targets in order to reach the set goals, streamlining of activities in order to avoid duplications and facilitation of further meetings/workshops on the working level and maintaining/reinforcing promotion of MARRI. The key objective for the remainder of 2006 and 2007 is successful

implementation of the MARRI Strategy and Programme of Action. It will be of considerable importance to pay attention to the capacity building in various relevant ministries to assume a more active role in initiating and advancing the MARRI Strategy and Programme of Action.

On operational level, the generation of financial resources from the international donor community (bilateral donors, EC funds etc.) for the gradual implementation of the MARRI Strategy and Programme of Action 2006-2007 will be of vital importance. As there is still a need for funds in order to enable a further successful implementation of its activities from the international community, the MARRI Regional Centre is working intensively on preparing and forwarding of MARRI project proposals to potential donors, with the orientation that the Centre implements its Strategy through concrete projects in partnership with interested EU and other States one of the most important aims of MARRI should be achieved and this is establishment of interstate dialogue in migration areas that are of mutual interest.

CONCLUSIONS

After two years of existence, the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje is a well-established institution in the region. It focuses on the organisation of workshops on migration issues aiming for tangible results that should primarily contribute to better regional cooperation in the areas of common interest. It provides a regional platform for dialogue, exchange of views, promoting co-operation and is a respected institution for MARRI issues. The MARRI Regional Centre is successful and its contribution for countries in the region is well appreciated as the number of activities aiming concrete results has increased and co-operation with other institutions working in the same fields has been expanded.

MARRI has been recognised by the international community and Member States of the Initiative as the voice of the region in the area of Justice and Home Affairs. This is the area of particular importance identified in order to ensure sustainability of regional co-operation process initiated under the auspices of the Stability Pact and thus preserve the positive legacy of the Pact. In order to positively answer the question on how to facilitate the process of regional cooperation, the example of MARRI should be considered closely. The fact that the MARRI Member States regularly come together on the operational and political level and are willing to offer support for required operational set-up increasingly utilizing their own resources and thus enhancing regional ownership (MARRI is approximately 50 % regionally financed) represents a model for facilitation of regional co-operation and support to the EU integration for the entire region in other priority areas as well (Economic Development, Infrastructure, Security co-operation, and Building Human Capital, Parliamentary Co-operation), in particular when it comes to the question of freedom of movement of population and to this end the support to economic development.

Although the support of the Stability Pact, the EU and other international partners is still of paramount importance, it is crucial that responsibility for the support of such initiatives and projects lies in the region itself as well. The sustainability of regional co-operation on MARRI issues depends to a large extent upon the involvement from the countries and their institutions in the region and the degree of their commitment. Therefore, MARRI Regional Centre shall undertake all efforts to engage the region towards even greater level of regional ownership. The key challenges remain the readiness and willingness of the countries in the region to assume greater ownership and leadership over concrete identified activities of common interest; in order to accomplish this strategic priority the availability of adequate financial support by the international community to carry out concrete programme-based projects should be secured.

The MARRI Regional Centre will further intensify its support to the upgrade of the Centre towards both the region and international community in Brussels. It will continue to facilitate dialogue with international and regional representatives of the governmental, legal, academic and donor communities. It will continue its work on the facilitation of the experience sharing and support of the establishment of operational links within the region, as well as the harmonisation and implementation of legislation of countries in the region with international and European standards. In this sense, the main focus in the forthcoming period will be placed on the implementation of the MARRI Strategy and Programme of Action 2006-2007.

In that respect, it is crucial to avoid duplication/overlapping of activities whereas the MARRI Regional Centre works in close and fruitful cooperation with a number of international organisations and other counterparts involved in relevant areas on the national, the regional and the international level. The institutionalised multilateral regional cooperation functions in a complementary and supportive way to the European integration process of the countries in the region and it is certain that MARRI can and will further build on present role of hub for consultations, dialogue, training, capacity-building and information exchange in MARRI fields.