

MARRI REGIONAL FORUM
Tirana, 5 April 2005
Declaration

We, the Ministers and high representatives responsible for issues of migration, asylum and refugees of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro, have met in Tirana, on 5 April 2005, in the framework of the Migration, Asylum and Refugee Regional Initiative (MARRI).

Also participating at the MARRI Regional Forum, as special guests of the Chairmanship-in-Office were the representatives of the European Commission, the Stability Pact, Romania (SEECF Chairmanship-in-Office), and of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in Kosovo.

Realizing the importance of regional cooperation in the field of asylum, migration, border management, visa regime as well as sustainable solutions for refugees and displaced persons, as a vital part of EU integration process;

Reaffirming the commitment of our Governments for managing population movements in Southeastern Europe, based on the recommendations of the Thessaloniki Agenda, as agreed at the EU-Western Balkans Summit, Thessaloniki, 21 June 2003;

Confirming our commitments adopted at the founding MARRI Regional Forum held in Herceg-Novi, April 2004 and the MARRI Memorandum of Understanding signed in Tirana, July 2004.

Welcoming the opening of the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje in November 2004;

Noting with satisfaction the Republic of Albania's outstanding coordination and cooperation of activities performed during its Chairmanship-in-Office of MARRI (April 2004-April 2005) and the excellent organization of the Ministerial Conference in Tirana;

Expressing our firm expectation that the forthcoming MARRI Chairmanship-in-Office of Serbia and Montenegro (April 2005-April 2006) shall give its full contribution to future coordination and realization of the activities and priorities laid out in this Declaration;

We have agreed that our priorities during the remainder of 2005 will be:

Visa facilitation within the region:

1. Taking into account the objectives of the EU-Western Balkans Summit Thessaloniki Declaration, we shall continue the discussion on further cooperation among our countries and the EU, in order to facilitate our respective visa

regimes, having in mind national policies and the compatibility with the relevant EU policy and requirements.

2. We shall enter into regional and bilateral discussions in order to enhance consular cooperation building upon the results of the EU CARDS Program. This process shall be focused on exchange of information, including warning and mutual alerting on suspected illegal transit flows and consular cooperation, according to best practices offered by the EU. A regional working group to facilitate these discussions will be established, consisting of representatives of the responsible ministries, and will convene regularly at the MARRI Regional Centre.

Visa facilitation for travel to the EU and Schengen countries:

3. While full visa liberalization for the whole region for travel to the EU and Schengen countries remains the primary aim, it is recognized that for some of our countries this is a medium or long-term perspective, depending on major reforms in areas such as the strengthening of the rule of law, combating organized crime, corruption and illegal migration, and strengthening their administrative capacity in border control and security of documents.
4. We welcome the Hague Program inviting the EU Council and European Commission to examine opportunities to facilitate issuance of short stay visas to third country nationals.
5. Taking into account the discussions on visa facilitation between the EU and neighboring countries, our countries are ready to enter into dialogue with the EU to discuss possibilities to enhance the current visa application process.
6. Recognizing that unequally applied visa regime towards EU Member States and Schengen countries hinders progress on the discussions of visa facilitation, we agree to have complete full visa liberalization for all EU nationals, according to the decisions by the respective governments.

Durable Solutions for Refugees and Displaced Persons:

7. The MARRI Regional Forum fully supports the Sarajevo Declaration on durable solutions to refugees and displaced persons (as signed during the Regional Ministerial Conference on Refugee Returns in Sarajevo on 31 January 2005). The signatories of the Sarajevo Declaration reconfirm their commitment to their obligations, implementing the proposed Road Map as established in the mentioned Declaration.
8. The MARRI Regional Forum and Regional Centre, with their regional ownership and with its particular mandate in the concerned area, support the activities as expressed in the Sarajevo Declaration.

9. We acknowledge the establishing of the Access to Rights Program, to support the return and/or integration of refugees and displaced persons of our countries, as well as minorities and stateless persons, in accordance with international standards and existing national legislation.
10. The MARRI Regional Centre, in close cooperation with the Chairmanship in Office, will communicate the Access to Rights Program and its objectives to the International Community to ensure coordination with other relevant activities and secure the necessary funding for its implementation. The MARRI Regional Centre will report to the Regional Forum on the progress made in the implementation of the Access to Rights Program.

Migration:

11. We welcome the efforts of the MARRI Regional Center on promoting measures to combat irregular migration and plans to exchange information on labor migration into, within and out of our region.
12. A Working Group, consisting of representatives of the responsible ministries, will be established and they will convene at the MARRI Regional Centre. The objective will be to develop common grounds for bilateral/regional cooperation, reducing irregular labor migration flows and promoting legal forms of migration, with the understanding that irregularity contributes to the development of smuggling and trafficking in migrant workers and particularly children and women.
13. We shall intensify coordinated efforts of our countries for the process of implementing the Ohrid Process on Integrated Border Management.

Coordination:

14. We express the need to revise the MARRI Program of Action and, in that context, instruct the MARRI Regional Centre to work out a proposal for an updated version to be presented for possible adoption by the Regional Forum in Autumn 2005, including also a proposal for the Statute of the MARRI Regional Center and the Rules of Procedure of the MARRI Regional Forum. Taking into account the numerous activities, initiatives and projects funded through external sources currently ongoing and planned within our region, we find the MARRI Regional Forum as a sounding board for new regional activities. To this aim, we support the development of the MARRI Regional Centre into a centre of expertise and as an information clearing house.
15. The MARRI Regional Centre is the focal point for maintaining and enriching the institutional memory of the Initiative. It supports the Presidency for the activities agreed and developed within the MARRI process.

16. Our countries will provide the MARRI Regional Centre with detailed information on ongoing and planned activities, initiatives and projects on a regular basis. This information will be made available to the public through the MARRI website.
17. The MARRI Regional Centre will convene donor meetings on a regular basis on ongoing and planned national and regional projects aiming to provide a clear overview of the activities to the donor community.
18. The MARRI Regional Centre will consult the European Commission on the format and structure of such donor meetings.
19. The MARRI Regional Centre will report twice per year at the MARRI Regional Forum on its activities and expenditures.

Done in Tirana, 5 April 2005