

**MARRI**  
**MIGRATION,ASYLUM,REFUGEES**  
**REGIONAL INITIATIVE**  
**REGIONAL CENTER SKOPJE**

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**MINUTES**  
**MINISTERIAL MEETING**  
**MARRI REGIONAL FORUM**  
**TIRANA, 5 APRIL 2005**


*Regional interior ministers and high state representatives met in Tirana on 5 April 2005 in the framework of the **Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI)**, where they adopted a joint declaration on regional cooperation in the field of asylum, migration, border management, visa regime and sustainable solutions for refugees and displaced persons. The participants have agreed that the priorities laid out in Declaration during the remainder of 2005 form a vital part of EU integration process and concern the following areas: visa facilitation within the region and for travel to the EU and Schengen countries, durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons, measures to combat irregular migration and plans to exchange information on labor migration into, within and out of our region and further coordination of the activities of the MARRI Regional Forum and its Center in Skopje. The MARRI Regional Center in Skopje is to be developed into the regional focal point for information on planned activities, initiatives and projects in the area of asylum, migration and displacement issues.*

*The participants vowed in part to intensify efforts to simplify visa requirements in the region and the wider area. Along those lines, the Interior Ministers from the region have expressed their readiness to enter into a dialogue with the EU and Schengen nationals in finding concrete measures for easing the current visa restrictions. The Declaration also called for closer consular cooperation among countries in the region, as well as for the warning and mutual alerting system on suspected illegal transit flows to be developed. The ministers agreed that if the countries of the region want to move closer towards European integration and develop economically, efforts to promote labor mobility within the region must be stepped up. The objective is to develop common grounds for bilateral/regional cooperation, reducing irregular labor migration flows with the understanding that it contributes to the development of smuggling and trafficking in migrant workers and particularly of children and women.*

*In addition, the participants reaffirmed their strong support of the MARRI Regional Forum for the Roadmap process on durable solutions to refugees and displaced persons. The participants particularly welcomed the establishment of the Access to Rights Program, which supports 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. The MARRI Regional Center, 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.*


Welcome Address.

 **Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Luan Hajdaraga** welcomed all and expressed his gratitude for the strong support to all involved countries and organizations, friends and donors of the MARRI Regional Forum and the Regional Center in Skopje for their coordinating job in the MARRI Regional Forum activities.


### 1. Opening Statements

 **Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Kastriot Islami** pointed to the importance that Albania attaches to regional cooperation, as confirmed by its strong involvement in the creation of MARRI Regional Forum and its Center and consequent success in this joint endeavor of the region. He emphasized the added value of regional cooperation to the processes of EU integration of countries in the region. The assurances were made that Albania will maintain its active and constructive role in promoting good relations among neighbors in the region and beyond. This is done through facilitating cooperation on existing important issues, such as refugee return and displaced persons, visa regime harmonization and consular cooperation. He expressed his firm conviction that the new Presidency of MARRI Regional Forum, Serbia and Montenegro, will move ahead the process based on the achievements up to date and the support of all of our countries in the region. He made a special appeal to participants to focus future efforts in “translating the political willingness” into concrete programs, action plans and adequate projects.

**Minister of Public Order, Mr. Igli Toska** reflected on the role of Albania as the first holder of Presidency of the MARRI Regional Forum and the presence of Albania through the Ministry of Public Order in all activities and forums organized by MARRI. Albania was especially engaged in migration issues, asylum, border management and entrance of foreigners on both national and regional levels. As a result of those activities, Albanian Government also adopted the National Strategy for Asylum and Migration a year ago. Minister Toska expressed his gratitude to the Albanian competent organs, international partners and countries in the region for their contribution in the coordinated fight against human trafficking and crime. At the same time, he made an appeal to the participants for closer coordination and cooperation on the activities such as information exchange, integrated border management, readmission and migration flows.

 **Minister of Interior, Mr. Ljubomir Mihajlovski** pointed to the priorities of their foreign policy (EU & NATO), where the future acceptance into EU also entails development of regional initiatives such as the MARRI initiative. He emphasized that the basic aim of this initiative is to create institutions with the capacity of control of the migration and to establish asylum regime for Southeastern Europe in accordance with the EU standards. Mr. Mihajlovski took notice of the Declaration, with special attention to the facilitation of the visa regime in the region and for traveling in EU through intensifying of the dialogue with the competent European institutions as well as establishment of permanent solutions regarding the refugee issues and internally displaced persons. As to the establishment of the MARRI Regional Center in Skopje, he expressed strong satisfaction of state authorities because of the fact that the Regional Center in Skopje became truly operational as of January 2005.

 **Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr. Dragan Jočić** presented the priorities of the upcoming Presidency of the Regional Forum of the Migration, Asylum and Refugee Regional Initiative (MARRI), as Serbia and Montenegro takes over a one-year Presidency from April 2005 to April 2006. He rendered strong support for a number of activities that shall strengthen and promote the MARRI, with a special emphasis on development of the concept of regional ownership. At the same time, he noted that MARRI will be the region's vehicle of approaching the European Union which shall highlight problems of relevance for the Western Balkans. Overall, the Presidency of Serbia and Montenegro shall make every effort to implement and improve a wide range of activities in the fields of migration and asylum, refugee return and integration, labor migration and consular cooperation.


 **Secretary in the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, Mr. Dragomir Kovač** confirmed benefits of the transfer of MARRI to regional ownership and development of closer ties with the European Union as a positive development which helps promotion and modernization of every country in the region. In that context, he mentioned the need to resolve the status of considerable number of refugees and displaced persons, where Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro signed the Sarajevo Declaration on solving refugee and DP's related issues on 31 January 2005. Furthermore, Bosnia and Herzegovina has undertaken a series of measures related to entry, movement and stay of foreign nationals in the country. After the Law on Movement and Stay of Foreigners and Asylum had been adopted, several bylaws were also passed.

 **Assistant Minister in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Mr. Tomislav Vidošević** expressed hopes of further strengthening of regional cooperation and ensuring overall stability and prosperity in Southeastern Europe. Regional cooperation as a whole is seen by the Croatian side as very important in the process of *rapprochement* with the European Union. Croatia expressed commitment to cooperation and development of good neighbourly relations with other countries in this part of Europe, especially on issues such as refugee return, fight against organised crime and corruption, money laundering, illegal migration and smuggling. Croatia has achieved considerable progress in

tackling the questions of illegal migration flows and asylum, also adopting new laws, which are almost completely in line with EU requirements. As regards regional cooperation and return of refugees, Mr. Vidošević emphasized the importance of Sarajevo Declaration, where Croatia has agreed to close the refugee file by the end of 2006.

**Ambassador of European Delegation in Tirana on behalf of the European Commission, Mr. Lutz Salzmann** welcomed the transfer of the MARRI under regional ownership of the SEECP. He congratulated all five SAP countries and especially Albania on their efforts within the MARRI initiative, also extending best wishes to Serbia and Montenegro for the upcoming MARRI Presidency. The European Commission has an advisory role, as the other MARRI Friends of Regional Forum, and participates in the ongoing efforts within this initiative to bring about a regional cooperation in the areas of asylum, legal migration, illegal migration, border management, visa policy and entry policies and return/settlement of refugees/displaced persons. The intention of the EC is to facilitate the development of political and economic relations between the EU and countries in the region in the framework of the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP), which is the strategy for helping them in its path towards integration into the EU. He mentioned the importance of EU Assistance Programs, especially the CARDS Program.


**Deputy Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe, Mr. Michael Mozur** expressed the support to the MARRI process noting that only a coherent regional approach by all countries can provide success, along the lines of the SAA process and Thessaloniki Agenda. The Stability Pact vowed to continue supporting the MARRI process politically, including through its networks in Brussels and with other key international organizations. He noted that visa restrictions imposed by the regional states towards some new EU Members States hinders progress on the discussions of visa facilitation and that these obstacles should be removed. He stressed that the important challenges facing the region are issues such as the search for sustainable solutions for refugees and displaced persons and migration management, which shall be dealt with in the framework of MARRI Regional Forum. In this context, he invited the participants in the 3x3 Sarajevo Declaration (January 2005) to look closely at the MARRI process and Center in Skopje for support, including MARRI in working groups and discussions and in particular to make full use of the potential of the Access to Rights project.


 **Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Mr. Constantin Eremia on behalf of the SEECP** extended support of the Romanian Chairmanship-in-Office of the South-East European Cooperation Process (the SEECP) which will soon come to an end. He pointed to the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding of the MARRI Regional Forum in July 2004, which represented a step forward in reaching a common goal of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries in the region. He noted that MARRI Regional Forum proved to be an excellent framework for preparing the European integration of the five Western Balkan countries. He also offered the sharing of experiences between SECI Center in Bucharest and the MARRI Regional Center in Skopje. In

this context, he foresaw that a co-operation between the two entities could be beneficial for the region and could address problems of common interest in the region. The SECI Center in Bucharest, as well as the MARRI Regional Forum and the MARRI Regional Center in Skopje represent clear proofs that the process of transferring responsibility to the countries in the region is a reality.

**UNMIK Deputy/SRSG, Mr. Jean Dussourd (as a Special Guest of Chairman in Office)** noted the importance of effective border and boundary control as essential in the fight against organized crime and illegal immigration. These problems are of great concern to Kosovo. In order to effectively target this problem in line with European standards, UNMIK has drafted a Regulation which will impose certain requirements on those seeking entry to Kosovo. He expressed UNMIK's support of the EU concept of integrated Border Management. The implementation of this strategy will commence in the coming months with an emphasis on improving facilities and infrastructure, the creation of a modern border and boundary management system and increased training and capacity-building initiatives.


## 2. Country Presentations on MARRI Issues (priorities in Asylum, Migration, Visa harmonization/liberalization, Refugee Return)

 **Ms. Argita Totozani, Director for Refugees, National Commissioner for Refugees** noted that in recent years Albania has strengthened the asylum system and made great improvements in enacting comprehensive legislation on asylum, immigration, and local integration standards. This is a process with no precedent, based largely on a close co-operation with other agencies dealing with such mixed flows, namely IOM, UNHCR and the OSCE. Albania is deeply engaged in a SAA process, where the general political and administrative climate is favorable towards asylum issues.

 **Ms. Gordana Valenta, Assistant Head of Department of Inspection & Administrative Affairs in the Ministry of Interior** gave a presentation on asylum, migration and visa system in the Republic of Croatia. Issues related to asylum are regulated by the Asylum Act and relating bylaws which have been in force since the second half of 2004 and are to a large extent harmonised with the EU *acquis*. As to the migration issue, as of 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2004 the Foreigners Act, with its relative bylaws has been in force in the Republic of Croatia. Visa regime is governed by the Foreigners Act and Regulation on travel documents for foreigners, visas, border passes and on the treatment of foreigners, as well as the Regulation on visa system. The Croatian visa system has almost completely been aligned with the EU visa system.


**Ms. Anamarija Radić, Directorate for Displaced Persons, Ministry of the Sea, Tourism, Transport and Development** presented a solution for the remaining displaced persons and refugees as one of the top priorities of Croatian Government. The Government has set deadlines for the end of 2006 to create conditions for the return of all Croatian citizens to their homes in Croatia and to solve the issue of the remaining refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina either

through their return or through local integration in Croatia. Croatia expects full support from its neighbors and concerned international organizations for the principles and solutions that have been integrated into the Sarajevo Declaration. In order to implement the declaration, each of the countries is currently engaged in preparations of their individual Road Maps.


 **Mr. Nenad Banović, Department of Border Police in the Ministry of Interior** elaborated on the activities of the Serbian Ministry of Interior on visa regime, migration flows, border management, readmission agreements and refugees and displaced persons, as well as asylum issues. He expressed his great satisfaction with the fact that the Parliament of Serbia and Montenegro has adopted the Law on Asylum in March 2005, which is fully harmonized with the laws of the European Union.

**Mr. Brano Perović, National Coordinator for MARRI Initiative in the Ministry of Interior** emphasized that efforts should be concentrated on the liberalization of visa regime in the region, where Montenegro has already introduced “out-of-visa” regime for the neighboring countries. He presented National Strategy for Sustainable Solutions of Refugees and Displaced Persons in Montenegro (which was adopted by the Montenegrin Government), as well as the National Action Plan on Migration, Asylum and Refugees Return (currently under preparation by the inter-ministerial working group). Montenegro has given its full support to the MARRI Access to Rights Program, which was initiated in Montenegro in cooperation with MARRI Regional Center in Skopje and Danish Institute for Human Rights.

 **Mr. Ljupčo Arsovski, Counselor in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs** stated that good results had been achieved in the field of border management and the National Center for Border Management is to be formed soon. Talking about legal reforms, he mentioned assistance and cooperation by the European Union, through Slovenia. The assistance is done through the CARDS Program, which seeks to reinforce the priorities of the SAA and the European Partnership and support the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. In the harmonization process of its key legislation, policies and procedures for asylum and migration matters up to EU and international standards, progress was noted in the areas of visa policy and the Law on the Movement and Residence of Foreigners.

 **Ms. Nermina Džepar-Ganibegović, Chief of the Department in the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees** referred briefly to the legislation process in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the goal is to transform the legislative system gradually by adopting European standards and legislation. The harmonization plan of the legislative system of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the *acquis* is a key to the progress in Stabilization and Association process. The authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina paid special attention to ensuring realization of the rights of refugees and displaced persons. In this domain, it is expected that the determination of refugee status will be prepared within the next two to three months.

### 3. Interventions by International Organizations and Donors' Representatives.

 **Ambassador Mr. Constantine Yovas** presented the activities of Greece, in light of the upcoming the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) Chairmanship-in-Office (2005-2006), with a special attention to efforts towards the institutional upgrading of SEECP. Greece sees the future of this Process through enhancing regional cooperation in a more efficient and result-oriented manner.

**Sweden, Ambassador Mr. Nils Eliasson** expressed full support for the MARRI Regional Forum, especially efforts of further exchange of information among countries in the region. The Swedish delegate concentrated on the fields of migration and asylum issues, aiming to provide further supportive measure for the countries in the region in concluding of the Stabilization and Association Agreements in the field of Justice and Home Affairs. In view of enhancing regional co-operation in combating illegal migration and asylum issues, he suggested closer coordination of the Forum with relevant CARDS programs.

**UNHCR, Ms. Catherine Walker, Representative in Skopje** expressed her delight with the fact that all countries in the region have Laws on Asylum. UNHCR expressed its clear intention to work closely with the Regional Center in Skopje and acknowledged its support for MARRI projects, including the Access to Rights program. Ms. Walker emphasized that MARRI member countries have made an excellent progress since the Dayton Accords in 1995 and she emphasized that commitments by respective governments remain important. Following the Sarajevo Declaration of January 2005, UNHCR wants to collaborate and assist in the process of return of refugees and displaced persons.

**IOM, Ms. Argentina Szabados, Chief of Mission in Budapest, Hungary** renewed its full support to the MARRI Regional Center adding that the MARRI has consolidated itself as an essential forum for fostering regional cooperation on migration management. As one of the founding partners of this regional initiative, IOM has provided the MARRI Regional Center support and administrative backup, in addition to their involvement in existing projects in the region. She suggested that, since the MARRI Regional Center has become a reality, to involve and incorporate the national agencies.


**ICMPD (International Center for Migration Policy Development), Ms Ann-Charlotte Nygård, Acting Director, Policy Development.** ICMPD promotes the inclusion of the Western Balkans countries into the common European migration and asylum framework in order to promote institution-building and respond to irregular migration flows and the trafficking problem throughout the region. ICMPD's involvement continues in the framework of EU funded projects in the region. Under the CARDS regional program, ICMPD is also implementing the Visa Module of the CARDS Regional Program Asylum, Migration and Visa, as well as the CARDS regional project on Integrated Border Management. In the MARRI agenda, the visa liberalization and facilitation issues are of highest importance. Overall, ICMPD has shown its readiness to work closely with governments in the

region on various migration issues and assist these countries both through informal consultation and institution building.

**CARDS Regional Project on Asylum, Migration and Visa, Mr. Anders Westerberg, Project Director** went over the Regional CARDS project on asylum, migration and visa (AMV), i.e. a series of seminars and workshops in each one of the spheres of asylum, migration and visa. The project has introduced a policy for regional cooperation in the AMV fields. Regional guiding will also be introduced in the upcoming document “Roadmap for Integrated Asylum, Migration and Visa Management in the Western Balkan Countries”. This document will be the final outcome of the project and it will present a practitioners handbook on how to implement the *acquis* and legislation in a concrete way in institution building and procedures. The guidelines will focus on cooperation and integrated management between the AMV authorities and agencies in the countries of the region, where he saw an important texture role to the MARRI Regional Center in Skopje.

**OSCE, Mr. Axel Jaenicke, Head of Return and Integration, OSCE Mission into Croatia** referred to the Declaration signed on the Regional Ministerial Conference on Refugee Returns (Sarajevo, January 2005), [which had been initiated by the OSCE, UNHCR and the EC Delegations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro](#) and related processes of designing [national road maps and a regional matrix](#) to resolve outstanding displacement issues in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro. He made an appeal to move from political commitments to demonstrations of political action, emphasizing the need for continued [international](#) funding and new projects ([in particular](#) housing and reconstruction in Bosnia-Herzegovina ~~and Croatia~~) in order to make Sarajevo Declaration realizable.

**Stability Pact, Ms. Petra Bläss, Senior Consultant on Parliamentary Cooperation to the Stability Pact** expressed her wish to see MARRI as a partner in the program for Parliamentarians 2005 and expressed her optimism for a fruitful cooperation. More specifically, she proposed the organization of a workshop for parliamentarians in the MARRI Regional Center in Skopje, in cooperation with the Council of Europe’s Migration Committee.

 **National Coordinator for the Stability Pact, Mr. Panayotis Partzos** made an objection to the name of the country mentioned in the Tirana Declaration, making reference to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with the name “Macedonia” He suggested that the name “Macedonia” must be excluded, in compliance with the common practice in the framework of the SEECP activities, i.e. to refrain from any mention of the countries’ names and to have flags and names of heads of delegations instead both in premises and in official documents.

#### 4. Strategies/Priorities of MARRI Regional Forum (MARRI Regional Center).

**Mr. Thomas Birath, Head of the Regional Center in Skopje** gave a resume of activities of the MARRI Regional Forum and its Center in Skopje. He presented the work of the MARRI Regional Forum and the Center as a platform for activities

dealing with population movements including displacement in the region. The work of the Regional Forum and the Regional Center was presented along the lines of the Declaration adopted at the MARRI Regional Forum in Tirana. Out of many activities of the Regional Center in Skopje, he emphasized the importance of the Access to Rights project and its complementarity to 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). He also noted that the MARRI Regional Center has a committed staff of seconded persons from the region, who provide a valuable input to the efforts of respective governments, international organizations and NGO's in the area of migration, asylum and displacement issues.

#### 5. Adoption of the Joint Declaration/Handover of the Presidency to Serbia and Montenegro.

After adopting the Declaration, **Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr. Luan Hajdaraga** thanked all the SaP countries and donors on their valuable contribution for the success of the MARRI Regional Forum in Tirana. At the end, the Presidency of the MARRI Regional Forum was handed over to Serbia and Montenegro for the period from April 2005 to April 2006. **Minister of Interior, Mr. Dragan Jočić**, expressed firm commitment of the forthcoming MARRI Presidency of Serbia and Montenegro to give its full contribution to future realization of the activities and priorities as laid out in the Tirana Declaration and Priorities of Serbia and

Montenegro Presidency.

