

MARRI



Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative



**MARRI REGIONAL CENTRE IN SKOPJE
REPORT (JANUARY - NOVEMBER 2005)**

**Stability Pact for SEE, Meetings of the Regional Table &
Working Tables
Prague, 15-16 November 2005**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this Report is to update participants of the Working Table III meeting in Prague, 15-16 November 2005 on the activities of the **MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje from January to November 2005**. This Report summarises the most important activities undertaken within the MARRI Regional Centre framework. As a consequence of the transfer of responsibility from the Stability Pact to regional ownership, the MARRI Regional Forum and the MARRI Regional Centre are not part of the Stability Pact. However, both the Forum and its Centre have a special link to the Stability Pact and thereby are being invited to the Stability Pact Regional Table Meetings, where the MARRI Regional Centre informs the Stability Pact about the ongoing MARRI activities.

The Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI) was formed within the context of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. Since July 2004 this initiative is under regional ownership as part of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP). MARRI is governed by its five MARRI Member States (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro), who meet twice a year at the MARRI Regional Forum. MARRI covers the following areas (including a cross-cutting programme Access to Rights (AtR)): asylum, migration, integrated border management, visa policy and consular cooperation, return/settlement of refugees/displaced persons. MARRI's top priority is the enhancement of regional cooperation in its fields of activities among countries in the region, as a vital part of EU integration process and in line with the Thessaloniki Agenda for the Western Balkans.

The MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje was opened in September 2004 and has been fully functional as of January 2005 to serve as a secretariat to the MARRI Regional Forum and to accomplish MARRI political commitments. In fact, the concept of regional ownership that has been developed by and within MARRI has proved to the utmost importance in voicing the needs and efforts of the MARRI Member States. All MARRI Regional Forum members have their representatives in the Centre, acting as a hub for consultations, dialogue, training, capacity building, information exchange and other regional activities. From April 2004 until April 2005 Albania held the Presidency of the MARRI Regional Forum, while Serbia and Montenegro took over the year-long Presidency at the Ministerial Meeting held in Tirana on 5 April 2005.

This year's experience has confirmed the need for stronger policy framework and adequate institutional capacity to support project development and improve effectiveness in MARRI areas.

The notion of regional ownership proved to be a way of achieving greater efficiency in the implementation of MARRI programmes. The MARRI Regional Centre has consolidated its role as a platform towards the European integration of the MARRI Member States, as well as its purpose of becoming the voice of the region. Regional ownership, as well as enhanced regional cooperation, has become an important asset by the works of the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS

Since its formal launch in November 2004, the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje has developed into a regional hub for a full range of activities, providing a forum for discussion in the form of seminars and workshops, expert services, advice on asylum and migration management issues and facilitation of experience and information sharing in this field.

All the information on the MARRI Regional Forum and its Centre can be found at a special information website on Internet (available at www.marri-rc.org). The MARRI Website promotes and highlights items of particular interest in respective countries and the region itself and various other items. It allows easy communication, presentation and gaining comprehensive information and coordinating activities on migration issues, promoting knowledge on those issues. The MARRI website was developed in order to coordinate and facilitate the process of providing training, research and information on a national and regional basis to parties dealing with MARRI matters in the region. This website provides the interested parties with the general information about the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje and the MARRI Regional Forum and its information is divided in the following sections: Background Information on the MARRI Regional Forum and its Centre; News (categorised news and press releases); Events (announcements and calendar of relevant seminars and conferences, reports linked with related image galleries); Projects (basic project information, contact persons, description, details linked with related document library); Document Library (categorized dynamic library); Image Gallery; Links and Search Engine.

Since January 2005, the MARRI activities have continued and contacts were intensified. In the following chapter, they are grouped as “political and strategic” and as “operational activities”.

A. POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES

The MARRI Regional Forum and its Centre received endorsement for its political and operational aims in the Memorandum of Understanding signed in Tirana in July 2004. In view of the transfer of the process of Stability Pact- MARRI into regional ownership (both Regional Forum and Centre), based on the established contacts and growing interest for MARRI, the MARRI Regional Centre has intensified its activities. Focus was given to intensified cooperation with the countries in the region and relevant international organizations to further create synergies. A number of formal and informal meetings with stakeholders and other relevant bodies has been conducted with the aim to further develop the MARRI initiative. Consultations with the relevant authorities in MARRI Member States, European countries and international actors (e.g. European Commission, IOM, ICMPD, UNHCR) were taken up and will be enforced henceforward.

The essential instruments of a coherent approach to MARRI issues comprises of three pillars: regional cooperation, regional ownership and EU integration. In this context, there are four general MARRI goals:

1. **Policy harmonization on a regional level.** Having regional cooperating as its core mandate, MARRI plans to provide a platform for regional exchange, bringing countries to have joint discussions, and establish positions of a common interest and decide on joint actions.
2. **Awareness Raising.** To strengthen regional cooperation, MARRI identifies mechanisms of harmonization through awareness raising activities. The lack of understanding the importance of having migration policies, leads to difficulties in developing comprehensive regional strategies and activities. Here, MARRI acts as a body (a think tank) providing an insight on overall benefits in a long term perspective.
3. **Legislation reform.** Meeting EU policy and EU *acquis* legislation standards, in all MARRI areas, and implementing reforms, is a key to a successful migration management and a necessity to support EU integration. Assisting MARRI States to meet set standards remains core activity.
4. **State administration capacity building.** Strengthening the state structure and increasing their capacities to implement reforms remains priority, where MARRI provides expert and technical assistance.

On the highest political level, **the MARRI Regional Forum Ministerial Meeting** held in Tirana on 5 April 2005 emphasised the commitment for intensifying regional co-operation in MARRI fields by making better use of the existent mechanisms (the MARRI Regional Centre), as well as by facilitating exchange of information and experience in the region. This has been perceived as a strong commitment of the participating states to foster further regional cooperation and the harmonisation of current practice and legislation with the standards of the European Union. 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 agreed that the priorities during the remainder of 2005 shall be in the fields of visa facilitation within the region and for travel to the EU and Schengen countries, durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons, migration (promoting measures to combat irregular migration and plans to exchange information on labour migration into, within and out of our region and process of implementing the Ohrid Process on Integrated Border Management).

Furthermore, in the Tirana Declaration there was an expressed need to revise **the MARRI Programme of Action** and, in that context, the MARRI Regional Centre was instructed to work out a proposal for an updated version to be presented for possible adoption by the MARRI Regional Forum in Autumn 2005. The preparation of the Programme of Action for the period of two years 2006-2007 is currently underway by the MARRI Regional Centre, through a consultative process with the MARRI Member States, relevant international organizations (Stability Pact, UNHCR, IOM) and important insights and expertise gained during the first year of realizing MARRI activities. The Programme of Action represents an operational plan to realize the goals set out by the MARRI

Strategy. It provides a practical and coordinated framework for action in the four main MARRI areas: asylum, migration, integrated border management and visa and consular issues. Additionally, the Program of Action integrates the Access to Rights as an implementing mechanism that cuts across each section.

Evaluation and assessment of past activities provide valuable lessons that are being incorporated into the design of future Programme of Action, but also in preparation of Strategy for 2005-2006. In support of this commitment towards a joint vision for the region, MARRI outlined a **MARRI Strategy & Activities for 2005-2006**, which is also being updated. The strategy for realisation of MARRI Regional Centre goals for the upcoming two years is prepared with reference to National Action Plans in the region and with input from offices of national coordinators in the fields of migration, asylum, consular issues and integrated border management. It defines main strategic objectives and modalities of involvement of MARRI Regional Centre in accomplishing those objectives. This document was elaborated and presented at the MARRI Donor Conference held in Belgrade on 13-14 June 2005, while its updated version is to be presented during next MARRI Regional Forum, to be held in Prčanj (Serbia and Montenegro) on 28-29 November 2005. The aim of the document is to demonstrate how cooperation on regional and national level and how the MARRI Regional Forum can facilitate intensified regional co-operation and is able to assist the SAP countries on their way into the European Union. With the support of all stakeholders and through the implementation of the strategy 2005-2006, MARRI expects to accomplish significant improvements in its mandated fields.

B. OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

In line with its mandate, below are some of the major activities organised by the MARRI Regional Centre in the year 2005:

Visa Experts Meeting, Skopje, 23-24 February 2005

The MARRI Visa Experts Meeting was organized by the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje on 23-24 February 2005, with representatives of national governments/experts from the region, as well as representatives of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. The MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje organised this meeting to initiate a regional discussion on visa regime harmonization/facilitation and consular cooperation. The participants reiterated the importance of the efforts of the MARRI Regional Centre as the administrative and supporting structure for the MARRI Regional Forum as a practical tool for supporting this ownership, strategies and programs of action in the process of alignment with the European Union requirements and standards.

Preparatory Meeting for the MARRI Regional Forum, Belgrade, 3-4 March 2005

The preparatory meeting for the MARRI Regional Forum in Tirana was held at the premises of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia and Montenegro in Belgrade on 3-4 March 2005 and was organised by the Presidency of MARRI RF (Albania), the then forthcoming Presidency (Serbia and Montenegro) and the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje, with the participation of political directors

from MFAs and MOIs from MARRI Member States and representatives of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

MARRI Regional Forum Ministerial Meeting, 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 labour migration into, within and out of our region and further coordination of the activities of the MARRI Regional Forum and its Centre in Skopje.

Information/Data Exchange Meeting on Asylum and Refugees, Skopje, 25 May 2005

The meeting was the first gathering of the heads of asylum units from the region organized by the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje. The participants exchanged views on information and data exchange on issues of asylum and refugees. As it was apparent that the network of regular data exchange among five MARRI Member States was lacking, the aim of the meeting was to take concrete steps towards establishment, for the first time, of a mechanism for gathering and exchange of information and to agree on methods, frequency and structure of information to be shared as a precondition for further action in order to identify fields for future activities carried out by the MARRI Regional Centre on national and regional level.

Donors' Conference/Meeting of the Friends of MARRI, Belgrade, 13-14 June 2005

A combined Donor Conference and Meeting of the Friends of the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI) was held in Belgrade on 13-14 June 2005 under the Serbia and Montenegro MARRI Presidency. The purpose of the Conference was to seek funding from the donor community for the ongoing and planned activities of MARRI in the issues of asylum, migration and visa policies under the framework of regional ownership and cooperation. The participants included representatives of MARRI Member States (Albania, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro), Austria, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom, USA, European Commission, as well as international organizations, including IOM, ICMPD, UNHCR, UNMIK, Swedish Migration Board, Stability Pact for SEE and CEI.

Meeting of Heads of Consular Departments, Skopje, 13-14 September 2005

The MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje organised a first meeting of Heads of Consular Departments of MARRI Member States. The Meeting was organized by the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje and the Presidency in Office of the MARRI Regional Forum (Serbia and Montenegro). The overall objective of the meeting was to make operational the Regional Working Group on Consular Cooperation (RWGCC), adoption of its working rules/terms of references and the plan of its activities for 2005-2006. The decision for establishing MARRI Regional Working Group on Consular Cooperation (the RWGCC) was brought by the Ministers and high

representatives of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro at the MARRI Regional Forum Meeting, held in Tirana on 5 April 2005 (Tirana Declaration).

Regional CARDS Seminar on AMV Management, Skopje, 5-6 October 2005

A Regional CARDS Seminar on Applied Integrated Asylum, Migration and Visa Management was held in MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje on 5-6 October 2005. The seminar was organised by the Swedish Migration Board, in cooperation with the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje. The target group of this seminar was the middle and high level officials as well as civil servants in SAP countries. This seminar sought to raise awareness and understanding of all concerned civil servants and officials within, mainly, the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in order to contribute to better strategic and technical understanding of national and EU standards and the best practices in the fields of asylum, migration and visa.

National Roundtable and Visit of Experts: The EU and Regional Perspective, Skopje, 14 October 2005

IOM Skopje organised the “National Roundtable and Visit of Experts: The EU and Regional Perspective” on the premises of the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje on 14 October 2005. The round table was organised in the framework of IOM Programme on Temporary Residence Permits (TRP) for Victims of Trafficking in cooperation with the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje. Its target group was the Macedonian state administration dealing with the issue of temporary residence permits, middle and high level officials as well as civil servants in SAP countries. Good practice examples from Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were presented in order to contribute to a better understanding of the benefits of introducing temporary residence permits for victims of trafficking in all the countries of the region. MARRI presented its plans on the platform of political cooperation of national coordinators on anti-trafficking in its member states.

Parliamentary seminar on the situation of refugees and DPs in the SP region, Skopje, 17-18 October 2005

Parliamentarians from the Council of Europe and OSCE as well as members of the European Parliament participated in a seminar on the situation of refugees and displaced persons in the region of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, which was held in Skopje on 17 and 18 October 2005. The seminar was organised by the Parliamentary Assembly’s Sub-committee on Refugees in co-operation with the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje as part of the Assembly’s six-month Chairmanship of the Parliamentary Troika of the Stability Pact for SEE. Participants discussed the problems of re-integrating internally displaced persons and refugees, the danger of explosive devices and the fate of missing persons.

Meeting on Incorporation of Asylum Issues into IBM, Skopje, 2 November 2005

A meeting on Incorporation of Asylum Issues into Integrated Border Management was held in Skopje on 2 November 2005. It gathered Heads of Asylum Departments and senior officials from Border Police units from MARRI Member States. The overall objective of the meeting was the discussion on incorporation of asylum matters into integrated border management in order to increase awareness for this kind of obligations among border officials and to strengthen capacities

of the border authorities for dealing with asylum matters, as well as the establishment of MARRI Working Group for Integrated Border Management.

Session on Establishment of Temporary Residence Permits for Victims of Trafficking, Skopje, 3 November 2005

The session on Establishment of Temporary Residence Permits (TRP) for Victims of Trafficking was held in the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje on 3 November 2005. This project is financed by the Government of Finland and implemented by IOM as part of the Regional- Counter Trafficking Prevention and Capacity Building Activities in Kosovo and Macedonia- Project. This session was used to present international obligations for implementation of the TRP (Palermo Protocol and Council Directive of 29 April 2004) and future drafting and implementation of the TRP instructions.

In order to answer regional migration challenges, MARRI also developed a cross-cutting program labelled **Access to Rights (AtR)**, whose main goal is to strengthen or reform legislative and administrative systems to guarantee access to social and economic rights for refugees, returnees, displaced, minorities and other vulnerable groups. Such a strategy underlines provision of technical expertise for States to adopt EU instruments (*acquis communautaire*) to deal with solutions of sustainable return and social integration. During the first half of the year 2005, AtR developed and prepared several projects for implementation. As a result, AtR has developed a project with the Macedonian Government (July/August 2005) with policy recommendations and brochures on refugee integration for assistance in their daily work. In the Montenegrin project (September 2005), AtR developed policy regarding the reform of the Montenegrin Commissariat for Displaced Persons, supporting the administration to address remaining issues of internal displacements. In addition, AtR team has developed project ideas for implementation in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, and is exploring possibilities of continued cooperation in Macedonia and Montenegro. Up to date activities also include the first AtR Regional Workshop on Integration Issues held in MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje on 29 September 2005, which was attended by all five MARRI Member States.

3. THE NEXT STEPS

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 Strategy & Activities for 2005-2006, the MARRI Regional Centre, in cooperation with partner countries/organizations/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.

In the field of **Asylum**, the MARRI Regional Centre will serve to contribute to the ongoing establishment of asylum systems in five MARRI Member States to provide efficient international protection in line with international and European standards, to strengthen national protection capacities and to straighten regional co-operation. Regional co-operation and co-ordination presuppose that States have the basic structures in place (laws, institutions, practitioners). In this sense, the MARRI Regional Centre will provide legal assistance to the countries in the region in

drafting of relevant laws and by-laws having in mind full inclusion of the international and European refugee law instruments. A key strategic element will be to organise training of all staff concerned from various ministries and authorities involved in the implementation process of new legal instruments.

The areas of interest for MARRI in **the migration area** are as follows: assessment/analysis of migration trends and prospects in the MARRI Member States, orderly migration, fight against irregular migration/counter-trafficking/security, readmission, return and reintegration, strengthening social cohesion, human rights, protection of minorities and parliamentary cooperation on migration issues. In its overall context, MARRI's primary objectives for the remainder of 2005 and 2006 are to act in full partnership with its Member States in order to evaluate past experiences and work towards strengthening regional cooperation and harmonizing standards in all key areas, while shaping future common approaches regarding new migration-related trends and challenges in the region, in line with the Tirana Declaration of April 2005.

The strategic objectives in the field of regional **visa and consular cooperation** will include protecting the area of five countries in the region from illegal migration flows, enhancing regional co-operation in combating illegal migration on the Balkan Route of third countries' nationals into the EU and Schengen countries and, liberalisation of visa regime inside the five countries alongside the aligning of national visa policies with the EU integration requirements and standards and the facilitation of the visa regime with the EU - recognising that while full visa liberalization for the citizens of whole region for travel to the EU remains the primary aim, for some of countries of the region it is a medium or a long-term perspective.

The MARRI Regional Centre strategic goals in the area of **Integrated Border Management** will focus on assisting countries in effectively managing borders on regional level. Assistance will be provided in achieving closer international co-operation (on a multilateral, bilateral and local level) with neighbouring countries in order to increase efficiency, facilitate trade, and prevent/reduce crime and irregular migration. This approach will include: assisting countries in negotiations (including MFAs in the negotiations in order to ensure proper reconciliation of interests), establishing of the contact office/information exchange forum with liaison officers for frequent information exchange, establishing of working group to coordinate national strategies, preparation of comparative analyses of operations at border crossings with recommendations.

The MARRI Regional Centre has also developed an **External Relations** strategy in order to promote MARRI and acquire funding for realisation of above mentioned strategic goals. This strategy spells out specific tasks to be carried out in order for all relevant information concerning MARRI in order to inform the general public and potential donors. It includes expertise and information sharing among MARRI Member States and increase of exchange and visibility toward external MARRI partners. The MARRI External Relations Officer shall also establish the network among MARRI Member States and external experts, to provide inputs for regular edition of MARRI newsletter/journal which will also be prepared for internet publishing.

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 revised Programme of Action, implementation of the Strategy & Activities 2005-2006 and its specified targets; continuation of refining of the concept, framework and mechanisms of MARRI in order to reach the set goals, streamlining of activities in order to avoid duplications; facilitation of further meetings and workshops on the working level and maintaining/reinforcing promotion of MARRI.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The work of the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje, which is both promising and difficult, paves the way for progress on MARRI issues, taking account of the root causes of migration and its consequences. It creates synergy between the regional actors who have an overview of the policies undertaken in both the European Union and in the MARRI Member States. That sort of overview has enabled the MARRI Regional Centre to propose and implement practical measures which are founded on an in-depth analysis of the political and socio-economic factors in the countries in the region.

As a general approach, solutions to the problems of the region should emanate from the countries of the region. It is clear that institutionalised multilateral regional cooperation functions in a complementary and supportive way to the European integration process of the countries in the region. Coordination of action and common goals boost their European course, strengthen their voice and reinforce EU efforts to form an effective regional policy. In this respect, the MARRI Regional Centre experts have worked in close and fruitful cooperation with a number of international governmental organizations managing to strengthen its partnerships with the relevant stakeholders and counterparts involved in relevant areas on the national, the regional and the international level. Further MARRI development requires, first of all, the full use of the professional resources provided for in the MARRI Regional Centre and relevant actors in MARRI Member States, in close partnership with international organizations and other actors within existing regional initiatives and processes.

The MARRI initiative, with the MARRI Regional Forum and its Centre, is well under way. The operational progress was achieved, but several preconditions must be assured for MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje to continue with its success in the future, i.e. regional ownership, common interest and sustainability. There is still a dire need for additional funds in order to enable a further successful implementation of its activities from the international community. All these important issues concerning the functioning and future development of the initiative will be discussed during the first MARRI Regional Forum under the Serbia and Montenegro Presidency, which will take place in Prčanj, Serbia and Montenegro on 28-29 November 2005. It is absolutely clear that the future activities of MARRI are to be seen in the framework of regional cooperation and regional ownership. In light of this, it is recommended to build on the progress achieved by MARRI so far and to nurture the emerging willingness on the regional level to foster the development of regional capacities in MARRI areas.