



THE SOUTH-EAST EUROPEAN COOPERATION PROCESS (SEECP)

5 April 2004

Joint Statement

Ministerial SEECP Meeting / Regional Forum of MARRI in Herceg Novi 5 April 2004

The SEECP represented through the ministers and Heads of delegations concerned with issues of relevance to MARRI.

Recognises the importance of regional co-operation in the field of asylum, migration, border management, visa and refugee return or settlement as a vital part of EU integration within the SA process, the Thessaloniki agenda and the Stability Pact and has discussed and decided as follows:

Transfer of MARRI to regional ownership and establishing of a MARRI Centre in the region

1. Decides to establish a professional and political **Regional Forum** for the five SAP countries composed of Ministers and Senior Officials responsible for migration, asylum, border management, visa and refugee return or settlement, to exchange information, experiences, lessons learned, best practices, as well as, to discuss and resolve issues of common interest and concern and develop a common vision for the region.
2. Agrees to develop the institutional framework to manage the Regional Forum i.a. by:
 - establishing a Presidency based on annual rotation between the SAP countries
 - delegating to the Presidency to convene and run ministerial and expert meetings
 - appointing an executive secretary, attached to the MARRI Regional Centre, to assist the Presidency and coordinate the work of the Regional Forum
 - upholding the link to European and Transatlantic co-operation institutions, notably EU, NATO and Stability Pact and to seek international support and advice by convening regular meetings with 'Friends of the Regional Forum'
3. Decides to establish an administrative/supportive structure for the Forum, the **MARRI Regional Centre** in Skopje and welcome the offer of the host country Government to provide the facilities, running costs and institutional framework for the centre.

4. Agrees that the MARRI Regional Centre should be composed of a majority of experts seconded by the countries in the region and supported by international experts as appropriate.
5. Decides that the establishment of the Regional Forum and the Regional Centre should be confirmed by a multilateral Memorandum of Understanding between the governments of the five SAp countries to be signed not later than end of June 2004.

Implementation of MARRI Initiatives linked to irregular migration and asylum

6. Agrees, as a first step, to support the implementation of the following activities:
 - Completion and implementation of National Action Plans
 - Workshop on National Action Plans
 - Workshop with SAp countries and Accession countries on the exchange of Information and lessons learned in the field of reducing irregular migration.
 - Setting up of a regional mechanism to support negotiations with source countries, transit countries and countries of destination with the aim to reduce irregular migration
 And agrees to consider, at the later stage, the implementation of other activities in accordance with the MARRI Programme of Action.

The MARRI initiative "Access to Rights and Citizenship" – to promote sustainable solutions to the outstanding problems of refugees

7. Declares the willingness to create conditions for the return of all-remaining refugees and displaced persons and uphold their human rights. At the same time declare without ambiguity that, whether they opt to return or settle elsewhere, all former refugees and displaced persons will be treated with all the equal economic, social and cultural rights.
8. Commits to the process and provide full support on national and regional level to the implementation of the project "Access to rights", aiming at achieving unimpeded and non-discriminatory access to all those still displaced citizens of the region (5 SAp countries) to their basic human, economic and social rights.

Information Exchange

9. Confirms the political and operational support to the development of a region-wide information technology system to manage population movements for all kinds of applications in the field of asylum, migration, border management, displacement and visa through the MARRI- Regional Information Exchange project.
10. Recognises the importance to implement adequate data protection legislation and confidentiality, as necessary prerequisites should be made.
11. Engages to promote and develop access to high quality country of origin information.

Visa issues – further progress on visa-liberalisation in the region

12. Agrees to proceed on implementation and co-ordination of activities with the aim of achieving the free movement of goods and capital on one hand and the free movement of persons on the other hand, which would require a harmonised visa policy and other measures as per the recommendations made in the MARRI Programme of Action.

Commits to engage relevant resources and expertise in support of a structured co-operation process.