

ZAGREB DECLARATION

MARRI Regional Forum
Zagreb, 19 May 2008

We, the high representatives responsible for issues of migration, asylum and refugees of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia have met in Zagreb, on 19 May 2008, in the framework of the Migration, Asylum and Refugee Regional Initiative (MARRI).

Also participating at the MARRI Regional Forum, as special guests of the MARRI Presidency-in-Office, were the representatives of the Slovenian Presidency of the European Council, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), DCAF, OSCE and UNHCR.

Realising the importance of regional cooperation in the field of migration, asylum, border management, visa regime and consular cooperation, refugee return, 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, which established the overall framework for the European integration of the countries of the region, remains highly relevant and we support its full realisation.

Realising that the European perspective of the countries of Southeastern Europe and their integration into European Union institutions constitute both an incentive and a catalyst for closer regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations in MARRI areas.

Welcoming the decision brought at the Summit Meeting of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) of Heads of State and Governments, Bucharest, Romania, 3 April 2008, to invite Albania and Croatia for NATO membership, and expressing hopes that Macedonia's invitation will be extended soon, as this decision offers a strong stimulus and further credentials for faster integration of these countries into the European Union.

Underlining the importance of continuous dialogue between the MARRI Member States to promote security and stability, enhance the cooperation in MARRI areas and to strengthen the institutions dealing with it in the MARRI Member States.

Expressing gratitude to the donors that have provided essential financial support for the MARRI Regional Centre and the implementation of its activities and projects, namely the Czech Republic, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden and UK; the Republic of Macedonia for providing financial means for the premises and all MARRI Member States for annual contribution for the running costs of the Centre from January 2008 onwards.

Noting with satisfaction the Republic of Croatia's outstanding coordination and cooperation of activities performed during its Presidency-in-Office of MARRI (April 2007-May 2008).

Expressing our firm expectation that the forthcoming one-year MARRI Presidency-in-Office of the Republic of Macedonia shall give its full contribution to future coordination and realisation of the activities and priorities laid out in this Declaration and the MARRI Strategy & Programme of Action 2008;

We convened at the MARRI Regional Forum and confirmed the following:

Croatian MARRI-Presidency-in-Office

Express satisfaction over the results achieved during the Croatian MARRI Presidency-in-Office, in particular:

- Decision of the Extraordinary Meeting of the MARRI Regional Forum to appoint a new Director of the MARRI Regional Centre for a three year mandate.
- Decision of the Extraordinary Meeting of the MARRI Regional Forum on the introduction of practice of annual contribution of the MARRI Member States to the Running Costs of the MARRI Regional Centre since 1 January 2008.
- Introduction of the MARRI Regional Centre Internal Work Procedure Rules, defining the general rules of conduct of the MARRI Regional Centre in its capacity of employer and of its employees as well as the mutual obligations of the parties in their employment relation.

Convey satisfaction over the increasing all-round and enhanced cooperation among the MARRI Member States. We appreciate the precious results achieved during the following expert meetings: Round Table “Strengthening the Cross-border Police Co-operation among the Countries in the Region (Zagreb, 14 March 2008) and the Round Table on “Suppression of Trafficking in Persons – Repatriation and Reintegration of Victims” (Zagreb, 9 April 2008). We express our sincere gratitude for the participation of the experts from the MARRI Member States in the work of the round tables and support the implementation of future similar MARRI projects.

Welcome the establishment of a mechanism for regular gathering and exchange of information in the format of migration questionnaires for 2007-2008 (Overview of migration management in the MARRI Member States, Country overview on illegal migration/combating trafficking and smuggling of human beings in the MARRI Member States, Overview of technical aspects of implementation of readmission agreements in MARRI Member States, Overview of asylum systems in the MARRI Member States, Overview of types of identity and travel documents in the MARRI Member States, Visa Questionnaire, Overview of personal data protection standards in the MARRI Member States, Overview of labour migration management and diaspora matters in the MARRI Member States).

Emphasise the importance of future implementation of the following MARRI project proposals: Building Capacity of MARRI Member States for Successful Implementation of Agreements on Visa Facilitation and Readmission; MARRI Interactive Migration Map; Assessment of Types of Identification Documents in MARRI Member States; Promoting a Regionally Integrated Approach for Successful Preventing/Combating of THB. These MARRI project proposals have been submitted to foreign donors and the proper implementation of these projects will be of crucial importance for the future work of the Centre. In that respect, we invite the European Commission and foreign donors from EU countries to support financially and politically our common efforts within the framework of MARRI.

Emphasise the importance of the adoption of the MARRI Strategy & Programme of Action for 2008 for its future work. It is imperative to show that the countries of Southeastern Europe cooperate in an institutionalised and systematic way. For the accomplishment of MARRI objectives, we welcome Croatia’s initiative to draft the MARRI Strategy & Programme of Action for 2008. Such a plan should contribute to the institutional enhancement of MARRI and in this respect to the promotion of MARRI issues in the region.

Call upon the upcoming Macedonian MARRI Presidency-in-Office to apply the MARRI Strategy & Programme of Action 2008 with a view to implementing the relevant activities by the end of its Presidency and beyond, as follows:

Migration:

Reiterate the importance of channelling the needs, interests and concerns of MARRI Member States in dealing with population movements, strengthening regional cooperation and harmonisation of existing experiences and best practices on the road towards EU integration, as well as building the capacities, exchanging information and best practices, as well as raising awareness of their state administration on the migration issues.

Emphasise the relevance of cooperation between governmental institutions and agencies responsible for migration on national and regional level with objective to develop sound migration management in the MARRI Member States.

Welcome the efforts of the MARRI Regional Centre on promoting measures to combat irregular migration and plans to exchange information on labour migration into, within and out of our region.

Work towards establishing a regional exchange of information and experiences among the countries of origin, transit and destination, aimed at reducing illegal migration. In order to cope effectively with illegal migration flows originating in or transiting through the region, we encourage co-operation between the appropriate authorities of the MARRI Member States.

Take necessary steps to have the questions of labour migration and brain drain incorporated in the work of the Centre and the MARRI Regional Forum in the most effective way.

Render its full contribution in the field of migration through organising seminars and other activities aimed at co-ordinating and monitoring action on MARRI issues in the region, based on the principle of complementarity with other international organisations and initiatives in order to avoid overlapping of activities.

Develop a roster of national experts from institutions managing migration (both regular and irregular) should be developed for all Member States to be used as focal points for future MARRI activities.

Trafficking in Human Beings

Enhance and coordinate activities regarding the establishment of effective response mechanisms to combat trafficking in human beings in the MARRI Member States. We urge the MARRI Member States to act both domestically and regionally. In pursuit of this objective, MARRI shall take into account and build on action already underway, as well as seek to fill important gaps in action. Co-ordination of all international actors is essential. We place high priority on the areas of victim assistance, training programs of competent bodies, intelligence and exchange of information, public awareness and strategy development.

Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements

Welcome the entry into force of the visa facilitation and readmission agreements between the EU and five MARRI Member States (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) on 1 January 2008. While aiming to achieve European standards, we reaffirm the importance of facilitation and harmonisation of visa regimes, respecting European Union commitments of the participating States.

Stress the importance of the visa facilitation and readmission agreements in moving towards closer cooperation between the EU and the MARRI Member States in the sensitive areas of migration and movement of persons.

Express readiness to enhance regional cooperation by further coordinating and improving the programmes and projects in the readmission area in the region and outside of it as well as to implement bilateral agreements on readmission in accordance with the EU practice.

Continue the discussion on further cooperation among our countries and the EU, in order to facilitate our respective visa regimes, taking into account the objectives of the Thessaloniki Agenda, as well as national policies and the compatibility with the relevant EU policy and requirements.

Document Security

Recommend the MARRI Member States to follow the EU standards in what concerns document security, as these activities improve capacity-building and regional cooperation as supportive instruments for freedom of population movements in Southeastern Europe.

Support establishment of efficient mechanisms for authenticity and verification of travel documents (detection of forged documents), database of specimen, cancelled and lost travel documents.

Appreciate the significance of established network of national experts by the MARRI Regional Centre within the fifteen-month MARRI Project on Document Security and Establishment of Identity in the MARRI Region (UK financed) that ended in March 2008. In this context, we appreciate the work of four Working Group meetings and Concluding Conference on Document Security and Establishment of Identity, contributing to the strengthening of cooperation in order to decrease irregular migration, trafficking and smuggling in human beings and to increase effectiveness of capacity-building of national administrations managing migration in the region.

Border Management

Work on establishing closer cross border cooperation to increase efficiency, facilitate trade and prevent/reduce crime and irregular migration. In that respect, we welcome the Guidelines for Integrated Border Management for Western Balkans drafted in the framework of the Community Assistance for Reconstruction, development and Stabilisation (CARDS) regional integrated border management (IBM) project "Support to and coordination of IBM strategies". It calls on the countries concerned to take all the concrete and specific measures necessary for the achievement of the objectives defined in these documents.

Asylum and Refugees

Develop sustainable and effective asylum systems including protection of refugees and their integration, as well as training and capacity building in the field of asylum and refugees.

MARRI Regional Centre/Presidency-in Office Coordination

Expect the MARRI Member States to pursue MARRI objectives at an accelerated pace, thus allowing the prompt passage of each of them to the next stage of relations with the EU within the Stabilisation and Association Process.

Invite the MARRI Member States to continue to develop regional co-operation, which constitutes an essential element of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

Express satisfaction with the MARRI Regional Centre becoming a regional facilitator and a platform for exchange of information and practices among its Member States, as well as nucleus for gathering of migration-related data by other international organisations.

Express eagerness to continue to provide the MARRI Regional Centre with detailed information on ongoing and planned activities, initiatives and projects on a regular basis. The MARRI Regional Centre would be responsible for further distribution of these and other information through its website, journals and other publications.

Commit to improve the level of regional ownership of MARRI Member States through taking full responsibility in decision-making and financial obligations, through jointly financing from 2008 onwards the running costs of the MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje, as well as through financial contribution for concrete projects and activities implemented by the MARRI Regional Centre.

Appreciate the partnership, cooperation and expert contribution of other international organisations and institutions, namely the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe, ICMPD, IOM and UNHCR.

Reaffirm our readiness to continue cooperation between MARRI and other international organisations, such as signed MoU's with ICMPD and SEPCA, based on the principle of complementarity in order to avoid overlapping of activities. In this respect, this cooperation has proven useful. MARRI shall continue cooperation and develop partnerships with major stakeholders in the area of migration, such as partnership with ICMPD within Project on Trans-national Referral Mechanisms and Project on Data Collection and Information Management, as well as Swedish Migration Board projects funded by AENEAS Programme in the MARRI Member States.

Welcome further progress in the process of coordination and project cooperation with various regional initiatives and organisations in the area, such as the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). To that end, MARRI shall take necessary steps towards ensuring MARRI's close and all-round cooperation with and greater involvement with the RCC.

Place special emphasis on working towards achieving better cooperation with the European Union and its programmes of support for the region. To that end, MARRI is envisaged as the region's medium of approaching the European Union and highlighting problems of relevance for the region on MARRI issues.

Work on facilitating exchange of migration related information and practices among MARRI Member States, as well as with European organisations, such as EUROPOL and FRONTEX.

Work towards intensifying contacts with competent institutions of the donor countries and international organisations aimed at promoting this Initiative and providing the funds for the MARRI activities in 2008 and beyond. 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.

Express gratitude to Croatia for its outstanding contribution to the Initiative over the period of its Presidency and for successful organisation of the meeting of the MARRI Regional Forum.

We place full trust in the Republic of Macedonia that is to assume the MARRI Presidency-in-Office for the period of one year.

Done in Zagreb, 19 May 2008