

Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative

BELGRADE DECLARATION

Adopted at the MARRI Regional Forum
Belgrade, 7 April 2006

We, the ministers of the MARRI Member States responsible for the area of migration, asylum and refugees,

Guided by the Herceg-Novi Joint Statement of 6 April 2004 and the principles expressed therein, and the Tirana Declaration of 5 April 2005,

Express our commitment to the recommendations of the Thessaloniki Agenda, as agreed at the EU-Western Balkans Summit, held in June 2003.

Underline the importance of continuous dialogue between the Member States to promote security and stability, enhance the cooperation in the area of migration, asylum and refugees, and to strengthen the institutions dealing with it in our Member States in the Stabilisation and Association Process.

Express the belief that the process of preparing our countries for EU accession should be strengthened and improved in the near future. In this regard, monitoring the latest developments in the region's efforts on European integration, express satisfaction over the increasing all-round and enhanced cooperation among the MARRI Member States and emphasise progress achieved throughout the region. In this context, especially support the concept of regional ownership, which proves to be essential for attaining the goals of the Initiative.

Appreciate the significant progress that has been made in the fields of asylum, migration and visa under the Regional EU CARDS project, which ended in December 2005 and reiterate the importance of continuing regional efforts in this regard.

Welcome the common approach to visa facilitation, as agreed by the EU Member States and the European Commission in December 2005, to make easier the travel from the Western Balkans to the EU/Schengen area and appreciate the willingness to take into account the special relationship with the Western Balkans.

Support fully the Sarajevo Declaration on durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons of January 2005 and restate the necessity for further regional efforts.

Reiterate the commitments undertaken in the framework of the Ohrid Process on Border Security and Management and emphasise the complementarity of MARRI with it.

Express gratitude to the donors that have provided essential financial support for the establishing of the MARRI Regional Centre and the implementation of its activities and projects, namely Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Sweden and USA; as well as to the Republic of Macedonia for providing financial means for the premises and the running costs of

the Centre. Appreciate the support and cooperation efforts of international organisations, namely the European Commission, ICMPD, IOM, OSCE, Stability Pact and UNHCR.

Express satisfaction over the results achieved in the region during the Serbia and Montenegro Presidency of MARRI, in particular:

Welcome and support the efforts made by the MARRI Regional Working Group on Consular Cooperation in establishing a factual overview on these issues as a basis for developing early warning system. The Working Group provides for regular exchange of information and experience in the process of harmonising visa policy and consular cooperation with the *acquis* and EU standards.

Take note with satisfaction of the development of individual roadmaps in the framework of 3x3 Initiative of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro; as well as the good results achieved by the Access to Rights Programme in promoting sustainable return and integration of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons, thus providing grounds for the MARRI Member States to address and implement priorities set by the national and regional strategies.

Welcome the opening of the process of dealing with orderly migration, where MARRI started with a process of exchange of information and networking on labour migration.

Underline the significance of regional cooperation in the field of readmission, where the signing of the EU-Albania Readmission Agreement is especially taken note of as well as the separate bilateral readmission agreements between the EU Member States and other MARRI Member States, respectively.

Welcome the establishment of a mechanism for regular gathering and exchange of information in the field of asylum.

And therefore,

Encourage and promote activities leading to cooperation on migration issues of MARRI Member States institutions and express readiness to enhance 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.

Note the need to expand and enhance cooperation among the Member States in the area of orderly migration and encourage the development of regional and bilateral agreements on regulating labour migration for seasonal work purposes.

Reiterate our commitment to explore the possibility of abolishing visa requirements for travel between our countries, and to work together in fulfilling obligations and conditionalities required for facilitation of visa regimes in force for our citizens in the MARRI region, in line with the Tirana Declaration and Thessaloniki Agenda.

Welcome the start of exploratory talks with Macedonia on the development of draft negotiations mandates for visa facilitation aiming toward a common approach to the conditions set by the EU for the facilitation of the visa regime with regard to the citizens of the MARRI Member States, where applicable.

Commit to accelerate implementation to bring the second appeal procedures and judiciary instances in the field of asylum in line with our commitments to implement international conventions on refugee protection and international human and refugee right documents, through activities of the MARRI Regional Centre.

Undertake to enhance the standards of reception of asylum seekers in our respective countries, through jointly developed laws, reception manuals, thus embedding a human rights based approach into our asylum systems, as required by the international conventions and the EU *acquis*.

Advocate a stronger protection of the rights of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons, to enhance sustainability of return and integration process by supporting national and regional projects through the Access to Rights Programme.

Encourage the discussions with the implementing partners of the Ohrid Border Process on Security and Management on inclusion of MARRI into its activities and programmes.

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Underline the significance of the adoption of the *Guidelines and Rules of Procedure of the Migration, Asylum and Refugees Regional Initiative* (GRP) as the fundamental document of the Initiative.

In this context, express satisfaction that *the Statute of the MARRI Regional Centre* has been adopted, as a complementary document to the GRP, responsible for defining the functioning of the Centre.

Emphasise the importance of the adoption of the *Strategy and Programme of Action of MARRI for 2006 and 2007* for its future work.

Invite the European Commission to support financially and politically our common efforts within the framework of MARRI, in particular the MARRI Regional Centre, as our preferred tool for the continuation and ensuring sustainability of the results of the Regional EU CARDS Project as well as an instrument for further regional cooperation.

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.

Thank the Serbia and Montenegro Presidency for the outstanding coordination and cooperation of activities performed during its Chairmanship-in-Office of MARRI (April 2005-April 2006) and the excellent organisation of the Ministerial Conference in Belgrade.

Place full trust in Bosnia and Herzegovina that will assume the MARRI Presidency for the period April 2006 - April 2007.

Belgrade, 7 April 2006
