

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Establishment of the Regional Forum of the Migration, Asylum and Refugees Return Initiative

Tirana, 2 July 2004

Recognising 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 Thessalonica agenda and the Stability Pact,

Confirming the decision taken by the first ministerial MARRI Forum, held under the auspices of the Presidency of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECp) and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Montenegro on 05 April 2004 in Herceg Novi, in line with the support received through the "Sarajevo Declaration" by the SEECp Heads of State on 21 April,

Formalizing the transfer of MARRI to regional ownership through the MARRI Regional Forum and establishing of a MARRI Centre in the region, the undersigned representatives from The Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, The Republic of Croatia, The Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro have reached a common understanding on the institutional and operational framework to manage the Regional Forum i.a. by:

1. Establishing a Presidency of the MARRI Regional Forum, based on annual rotation between the SAp countries.
2. Delegating to the Presidency to initiate, convene and run ministerial and expert meetings.
3. Deciding to establish an administrative/supportive secretariat for the Forum, the MARRI Regional Center in Skopje as per the Terms of Reference hereby enclosed and welcoming the offer of the host government to provide the facilities, running costs and institutional framework for the centre.
4. Authorizing the Presidency -in - Office the Republic of Albania to sign the Headquarter and Host Agreement for the MARRI Regional Center on behalf of the Regional Forum with the Government of the Republic of Macedonia.
5. Appointing an Executive Secretary, as per agreed procedures, attached to the MARRI Regional Center, serving as its Head, to assist the Presidency and coordinate the work of the Regional Forum.
6. Upholding the link to European and Transatlantic co-operation institutions, notably EU, NATO, OSCE and Stability Pact and to seek international support and advice by convening regular meetings with 'Friends of the Regional Forum'.
7. Agreeing that the MARRI Regional Center should be composed of a majority of experts seconded by the countries in the region and supported by international experts as appropriate.
8. Agreeing to contribute to the staffing requirements of the Regional Center with at least one national expert per participating country through secondment and additional staff as required in consultation with the Head of the Center and The Presidency of the Forum.

9. Understanding that a comprehensive staffing table, Terms of Reference for each position and an annual budget will be developed by the MARRI Secretariat in cooperation with the Presidency, to be considered by the Regional Forum.
10. Providing the base salary and entitlements, social security and insurance to the national experts from the sending country, with the understanding that additional costs such as travel, communications and allowances are covered by the budget of the regional center.
11. "Agreeing, after 2005, to consider possibilities of financing an appropriate part of budget and the contribution of the Government of Macedonia to running the facilities in accordance with the needs to be jointly identified".
12. Continuing as a first step to support and facilitate the implementation of the following MARRI Initiatives:
 - Completion and implementation of National Action Plans in the field of asylum and migration.
 - 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.
 - "Access to Rights and Citizenship" - to promote sustainable solutions to the outstanding problems of refugees and displaced whether they opt to return or settle elsewhere, committing to the process and provide full support on national and regional level to the implementation of the project, aiming at achieving unimpeded and non-discriminatory access to all those still displaced citizens of the region to their basic human, economic and social rights.
 - 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 (RIE), recognizing the importance to implement adequate data protection legislation and confidentiality.
 - 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 harmonized visa policy and other measures as per the recommendations made in the MARRI Programme of Action.
 - to promote and develop access to high quality country of origin information.
13. Recognizing that as consequence of the transfer of responsibility from the Stability Pact to regional ownership through the SEECP, the Forum and the Regional Center are not part of the Stability Pact. However the Regional Forum and the Regional Center shall have a special link to the Stability Pact as "associated initiative to the Stability Pact" and thereby being invited to the Stability Pact Regional Table Meetings. In these meetings the Regional Forum and the Regional Center will inform the Stability Pact about the ongoing activities.

Done in Tirana, on 2 July 2004

Republic of Albania
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Republic of Croatia
Republic of Macedonia
Serbia and Montenegro