



## **MAIN CONCLUSIONS**

### **Second Meeting of the Regional Working Group on Consular Cooperation (RWGCC)**

**Skopje, 22- 23 February 2006**

The Second Meeting of the Regional Working Group on Consular Cooperation (RWGCC), convened in MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje, on 22-23 February 2006, with the participation of representatives of the consular departments of the MARRI Member States (MMS), notably from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro, was dedicated to the analysis of the main results of the questionnaire on visa and consular issues, as conducted during the period from November to December 2005.

The overall goal of the Meeting was providing of a comprehensive and factual overview, indicating gaps, state of affairs of visa policy and consular developments in the MMS and overall regional consular cooperation.

The participants reiterated the complementarities of the activities of the RWGCC, built upon the results of the EU Regional CARDS Programme (Visa Module) 2004-2005.

Recognising that MMS are moving toward the EU integration with different paces (Croatia and Macedonia given the candidate status and Albania signed the SAA with the EU on 18 February 2006), the Meeting pointed out that every step forward in regional consular cooperation should not obstruct individual countries' efforts to meet the obligations and requirements set by the EU (beyond the determined deadlines).

The participants stressed out the importance of further harmonisation of national visa policies of the MMS with the EU visa policy and *acquis* standards, taking into account each country's national interest, but also as part of it - the **regional coherence** in visa policy.

The Second Meeting of the RWGCC welcomed the joint efforts of the MMS for advancing the regional cooperation on visa and consular-related issues. It was recommended that in order to meet the objectives of the MARRI Plan of Action in Visa Policy and Consular Cooperation for 2006 – 2007, the regional consular cooperation should focus on the following issues:

1. Essential improvement of National Visa Management systems, noting that there is an urgent need for serious attention, work and investments that some of the MMS should pay and do in order to meet the standards required by EU. This includes further **legislation** reforms, investments in **IT** for establishing, an intranet-based national VIS, accessible and password protected for all visa-issuing institutions involved in visa issuance and indispensable for having a national **visa register/database**, in supplying the DMCP and border guards in a unified way with necessary **inspection devices**;

2. In accordance with Tirana Declaration dated 5 April 2005 and further enhancement of consular cooperation, the MARRI Member States will establish a lasting cooperation for regular exchange of information and experiences (with a special emphasis on regional early warning and alerting system). The MARRI Regional Centre in Skopje recognises that preconditions for implementation of the above mentioned consular cooperation should be met (i.e. technical equipment, financial means etc.)

3. Standards and conditions required to facilitate visa regimes in force between the MARRI Member States should be in conformity with the relevant *acquis* and EU standards. Where applicable, 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.

4. Development and introduction **in the MARRI Member States** of the new travel documents (passport, IDs) and visa sticker with the security features in accordance with EU standards. A uniformed format and types for visas for all MARRI Member States, conforming to the EU/Schengen visa format, should be used.

The Second Meeting of the Regional Working Group on Consular Cooperation authorised heads of consular departments, participants of this Meeting, to inform respective MMS' authorities of MFA/MOI about these conclusions.