



---

## MINUTES

---

**SUBJECT:** Round Table/Workshop “Improvement and intensification of access to information and exchange data on migration and refugees among MARRI Member States. No visa, no tariffs, free movement zone among MARRI Member States”

**VENUE:** Tirana, Albania

**DATE:** 22 June 2010

**PRESENT:** see list of participants

---

### Summary

In line with the MARRI priorities, the Albanian MARRI Presidency in-Office and the MARRI Regional Centre held the Round Table/Workshop “Improvement and intensification of access to information and exchange data on migration and refugees among MARRI Member States. No visa, no tariffs, free movement zone among MARRI Member States”.

High level representatives from the ministries of foreign affairs and ministries of interior of MARRI Member States convened at this Round Table/Workshop, which presented an opportunity to exchange and share expertise and experience on the subject matter, to discuss and identify modalities for further steps.

The Minister of Interior of the Republic of Albania, Mr. Lulzim Basha, the Minister of Labor, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Mr. Spiro Ksera, as well as the Ambassador of EU to Albania, H.E.Helmut Lohan, welcomed the workshop. Representatives from international and regional organizations (RCC, UNHCR, ICMPD, IOM) also took part presenting and sharing their expertise and experience.

All the participants voiced strong support for MARRI and for the regional cooperation, as well as for the idea of free movement of citizens of the region. Also they expressed appreciation for the topic of this Round Table, as well as the wish that Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina be exempted from the EU visa requirement as soon as possible.

The Round Table/Workshop was chaired by the Director General of International and Consular Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania, MARRI President-in-Office, Mr. Mal Berisha, and the MARRI RC Director, PhD. Trpe Stojanovski.

### Welcome speeches

In his welcome speech, the Minister Lulzim Basha stated that during the MARRI Presidency-in-Office the top priority of Albania will be the free movement of citizens of the region, "...our main goal is to produce within a short period of time an agenda for the creation of the Balkan Schengen, the free movement of the citizens of our countries without borders, tariffs or custom barriers". Mr. Basha said that the conditions have matured for the creation of the Balkan Schengen zone. He expressed the readiness of Albania to exchange data regarding the migration in our countries in order to establish a common database that encompasses all the migration phenomena that our countries face. Mr. Basha expressed the readiness of Albania that the Center for Blue Border Control in Durres to become a regional centre. Also Minister Basha informed the participants about the recent achievement of Albania, the fulfillment of a new obligation put last March by the European Commission: the adoption of a complete and comprehensive National Strategy for the Integration of the Returnees and Action Plan.

The Minister Basha, on behalf of the Albanian MARRI Presidency, on behalf of the Albanian Government, asked that the MARRI Member States, as well as the European Commission, consider the presence of Kosovo in MARRI.

The Minister of Labor Spiro Ksera, expressed appreciation for the contribution of MARRI to the management of migration and movement of citizens in the Western Balkans and pointed out that Albania, as one of the European countries with the highest percentage of its citizens migrants, is particularly interested in the issues relating the migration management. He informed about the progress done by Albania in the management of migration flows through adoption and implementation of effective policies in compliance with European standards. He stated that in the new circumstances of accelerated integration of the countries of the region in Europe and of visa liberalization for the citizens of these countries, the cooperation of our countries is not only necessary, but also indispensable.

The Ambassador of EU to Albania Helmut Lohan, expressed support for MARRI and for the Albanian Presidency-in-Office. He also backed the idea presented by the Minister Basha about the creation of a Balkan Schengen in our region. He conveyed the appreciation of EU for the spirit of cooperation in the region stating: "Backing the regional cooperation in the economic and political level is always a priority for the European Union."

Mr. Lohan also backed the idea of Mr. Basha about a possible participation of Kosovo in the MARRI Fora, stating: "Kosovo is not beyond the EU considerations", "we believe that the Sarajevo Summit formula should help MARRI".

The MARRI President-in-Office Mal Berisha welcomed the participants as well. He expressed satisfaction that Albania is presiding MARRI for the second time and that since the last MARRI Forum two positive events have happened: Albania lifted visas for Serbians and Croatia lifted visas for Albanians.

The Director of MARRI Regional Centre Trpe Stojanovski considered the meeting a promotion of Albanian Presidency. He underlined the importance of the free movement for our region and expressed hope that this will soon be achieved. Mr. Stojanovski thanked for the presence of the Ministers in the meeting and considered it a further

recognition given to the MARRI regional ownership. He presented the most important activities of MARRI, with a special emphasis on the work done for establishing networks of cooperation with regional partners.

## **SESSION I**

### **MARRI Member States Statements**

The national representatives throughout country presentations contributed to the topic of the Round Table, with a special focus on particularities of national policies and on identification of possible barriers/gaps towards the goal.

The representative of Albania presented the progress made by the country in meeting the European standards in the field of Asylum management.

The representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina brought recent information about his country's migration politics, the adoption of the Strategy for migration and asylum, the ways of implementing this Strategy. According to him, Bosnia and Herzegovina has fulfilled all the requirements necessary for the process of visa liberalization with the EU.

The representative of Croatia stressed the support and importance that Croatia gives to MARRI and to the regional cooperation, while is very much committed in pursuing its main objective, the EU membership.

The representative of Macedonia presented current state of affairs in the field of consular affairs and visa system in Macedonia emphasizing high features and performances of Macedonian NVIS. He offered Macedonian experience and expertise in that respect and expressed his viewpoint that he can't see any obstacle citizens of MARRI Member States to travel throughout the region if they are in possession of biometric ID cards.

The representative of Montenegro expressed general support of Montenegro to the ideas contained in the topic of the meeting. He stated that the intent of the topic of this meeting is a process, which presumes continuation of consultations with the European Commission, creation of adequate infrastructure for collection, keeping and recording data intended for exchange among MARRI Member States as well as definition of modalities of cooperation and exchange of data through closer contacts and meetings between experts working in competent ministries and other institutions. He also brought to the attention of the meeting the barriers of the national legislation that hamper the Albanian citizens entering Montenegro with biometric ID cards.

The representative of Serbia informed about the Serbian visa policy and the progress made with the adoption of Schengen style visas. He underlined the issue of completing the readmission agreements with all MARRI countries as well as agreements on exchange data of citizens who misuse the visas.

Regarding the visa policy of Serbia in the region, he stated that Serbia has a specific visa policy due to its specific geographical position.

## **SESSION II**

### **Statements by international organizations**

The representative of RCC reaffirmed the RCC support to MARRI, the recognition of MARRI as a reliable partner. He expressed support for the idea of "Schengen-like" area, as he named it. He gave precious suggestions for future MARRI activities, that should help MARRI materialize its objectives in general and the ideas of this meeting in particular.

The representative of UNHCR expressed support for initiatives that deal with refugees and asylum issues, for initiatives that foster the cooperation for exchange any data regarding citizens. But draw attention to the idea of international protection and of respect for human rights.

The representative of ICMPD advanced a proposal:" to consider jointly with MARRI Forum and MARRI RC the possibilities on how to implement a comprehensive and harmonized knowledge base on migration in its broadest context, taking stock of the fundamental principles to be applied in every State which acknowledges basic democratic values: the rule of law and the observation of the human rights. Such a capacity building operated on regional level would assure institutional sustainability of the state capacity indispensable to support visa free movement of the citizens of each of MARRI Member States".

The representative of IOM congratulated for the topic of the Meeting and focused on sharing the experience in data collection management, the aims and the ways of data collecting, with a special emphasis on the issue of definitions and compatibility of data.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

The participants had a fruitful discussion and exchange of opinions about different issues raised during the meeting.

Regarding Kosovo, Mr. Mal Berisha said that the presence of Kosovo in MARRI is a necessity and for this case might be applied the Sarajevo Summit formula.

The Serbian representative replied saying:"Kosovo and Metohia is part of Serbia, is under UNMIK and the Sarajevo Summit formula cannot be used in this case, for regional initiatives".

Relating to the idea of exchange data, the ICMPD representative noted that it is important before setting up the mechanisms, to be elaborated common concepts, in order to acquire data compatible at regional level.

## **Conclusions and further steps**

The MARRI President-in-office Mal Berisha thanked the participants for the fruitful meeting and exchange of ideas, as well as congratulated the MARRI RC on the work done for the preparation of this meeting. He reaffirmed the commitment of the Albanian MARRI Presidency to achieve the goal.

Trpe Stojanovski, on behalf of the MARRI RC thanked the Albanian Presidency for the hospitality and expressed gratitude to the MARRI MS for their cooperation and support. The following conclusions were reached:

- The presence of high level representatives – Ministers of Interior and Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the Republic of Albania, clearly expresses the commitment and support given to the MARRI Initiative and its Secretariat in Skopje by the Albanian MARRI Presidency-in-Office;
- The presence of the Head of the EU Delegation to Tirana as well as the presence of international organizations also clearly expresses the support given to MARRI and to strengthening of the regional cooperation in general.
- The commitment and support to the MARRI Initiative and its Secretariat in Skopje has been clearly expressed and given by the MARRI Member States National Delegations as well;
- MARRI Member States National Delegations expressed full support to Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina offering their experience and expertise in the process of achieving visa liberalization;
- Welcoming initiative for establishment of region without visa barriers which will enable free movement of citizens of all MARRI Member States taking into consideration country specifics;
- MARRI and the forthcoming Montenegrin Presidency of SEECP to organize a common activity as follow-up to the topic of this Round table.
- Need for common and regional approach in exchanging data on migration and refugees has been recognized. Precise modalities for exchanging data should be explored (i.e. in the format of close expert meetings);
- Welcoming offer of the Republic of Albania its Centre for Blue Border Control in Durres to become regional centre;
- Confidence that the Albanian Presidency-in-Office will continue with further enhancement of regional priorities in the MARRI fields of activities.