



**STATEMENT DELIVERED BY AMBASSADOR VLADIMIR MATEK ON BEHALF OF THE
DELEGATIONS OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, CROATIA AND SERBIA AND
MONTENEGRO ON REGIONAL MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON REFUGEE RETURNS,
SARAJEVO, 31 JANUARY 2005**

Permanent Council Meeting No. 543, 3 February 2005

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

It is my sincere pleasure to speak on behalf of the delegations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and Croatia and to inform the Permanent Council that the Regional Ministerial Conference on Solving Refugee and Displaced Persons–Related Issues was held in Sarajevo on 31 January this year, hosted by Mr. Adnan Terzić, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of B&H. On that occasion the representatives of the Governments of the three countries signed a Declaration committing themselves to taking all necessary measures in order to completely finalize the process of return of refugees in the region by the end of 2006.

The Conference was greatly supported by assistance and participation of the OSCE – represented through the Heads of the three Missions -, the representatives of the European Commission and the UNHCR, who all welcomed the efforts of the respective Governments aimed towards the final resolution of this very important issue.

In the Declaration the Ministers have, on behalf of their Governments, agreed to facilitate the remaining returns of refugees and internally displaced persons without any discrimination and to provide them with all necessary assistance, welcoming the support of the UNHCR, the EU and the OSCE in that matter. It was stipulated that the refugees who do not wish to return will be assisted by their host country to locally integrate. The Ministers have also agreed to develop an individual action plan for each country which would be unified in a joint implementation matrix – a form of a Road Map in order to close the process of return.

We consider this political commitment of our three countries to be a valuable proof of good cooperation and normalization of relations between the countries of the region as well as a significant step forward to lasting peace and stability in the South-eastern Europe.

The integral text of the Declaration will be distributed as an annex to this statement.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

**Regional Ministerial Conference on Refugee Returns
Sarajevo, January 2005**

DECLARATION

We, the ministers responsible for refugees and internally displaced persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia and Montenegro, met today in Sarajevo to identify our individual and joint activities that should be undertaken in the forthcoming period with the assistance of the international community in order to ensure a just and durable solution to refugee and IDP situation in our countries;

Considering that a just solution to this important issue must primarily be in the interest of safety, dignity and well-being of individuals and peoples, and should also contribute to peace and stability in Southeastern Europe, as well as to the efforts our countries are making to join the EU;

Aware of the fact that getting over the legacy of the war falls within the full normalization of relations between our countries;

Confirming our commitment to implement international conventions on refugee protection, notably the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, along with the 1995 General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina and especially its Annex VII as well as the existing bilateral agreements;

Taking into consideration the Programme for returns of and care for refugees and internally displaced person - Republic of Croatia, 1998; the Agreement on Cooperation between the future Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Independent Democratic Serb Party delegates to the Parliament of Croatia, 2003, the Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the implementation of Annex 7 to the Dayton Peace Agreement (BiH, 2002), the National Strategy on solving the issues of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (Serbia, 2002) and the National Strategy for Durable Solutions of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (Montenegro, 2005-2007);

Taking into consideration the progress made over the years in returns between our countries, and aware that outstanding challenges in refugee returns require our cooperation; and fully aware that all refugees have the right to return in safety and dignity;

Reaffirming that all refugees have an undeniable right to opt for their permanent residence, and fully resolved to undertake all the necessary national and administrative actions to allow the implementation of their decisions and to ensure a just solution to refugee situations in our countries,

We have agreed as follows:

1. Pursuant to our country programmes, we are committed to solving the remaining population displacement by the end of 2006, to facilitating returns or local integration of refugees and internally displaced persons in our countries, depending on their individual decisions, without any discrimination, and providing assistance and support to refugees and internally displaced persons in cooperation with UNHCR, the EU and OSCE;
2. Access to all rights and entitlements, including the right to accommodation, shall be ensured in a fair and transparent manner, while all social, legal, procedural or any other requirement for the implementation of the above-said shall be met in the spirit of the present Declaration.
3. Without prejudice to the precedence of the right to return, refugees who have chosen not to return will be assisted by their new host countries to locally integrate in accordance with their national legislation.
4. UNHCR, as well as the EU and OSCE are invited to assist our governments in the return process and local integration and to raise financial and other support and assistance from the international community;
5. Upon return or local integration, all refugees shall enjoy the same rights and shall have the same responsibilities as all other citizens, without any discrimination;
6. The above mentioned principles and goals shall serve as a basis for the development of individual action plans ("Road Map") in our countries, including a comprehensive list of all the tasks that must be undertaken and each country shall bear the individual responsibility for the implementation. Those individual plans of activities shall be unified in a joint implementation matrix;
7. Each country shall prepare its own action plan within the next three months. During the same timeframe UNHCR is invited to assist in creating the necessary databases.
8. We commit ourselves to appointing the representatives of the responsible ministries and other relevant bodies, and we invite UNHCR, as well as the European Union and OSCE to appoint their representatives to the Task Force. The Task Force shall meet at least four times a year to:
 - unite individual action plans in a joint implementation matrix;
 - review the data base referred to in paragraph 7 herein;
 - review the remaining challenges from (i) repatriation programmes and access to the rights, (ii) economic development in the areas of returns and integration, (iii) exchange of data on durable solutions, and (iv) possible issues of local integration, including, *inter alia*, issues related to social protection of vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, patients and single mothers;

- monitor the implementation of the joint implementation matrix;
- prepare ministerial meetings which will take place at least once a year.

This Declaration is done in three original copies in the official languages of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia, and Serbia and Montenegro.

Done at Sarajevo, on January 31, 2005



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