

# Building Lasting Relationships

Marshall Center alumni from Southeast Europe form first-ever regional association



Marshall Center Alumni Association for Southeast European Security.

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**S**outheast Europe alumni representatives and neighboring countries met June 13-17, 2011, at the Marshall Center in Garmisch, Germany, with the goal of strengthening and enhancing national and regional security through cooperation. Participating countries included Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey and Ukraine. Alumni leaders of the 14 nations signed the first-ever charter creating the Marshall Center Alumni Association for Southeast European Security (MCAASEES). Members developed this idea over the past year, taking their cue from a May 2010 workshop titled “Building Marshall Center Association Capacity for Regional Cooperation in Southeast Europe.” The representatives at this event agreed that an association could contribute to creating an atmosphere of trust, improve neighborly relations and enhance stability in their region. During the year, using the Marshall Center’s graduate portal as a collaborative tool, they presented various proposals as to how such an association should look, how it should operate and what its goals would be. The June 2011 workshop was a culmination of hard work by the individual association members. The charter was signed by all the members. Included as part of the charter are seven specific goals dealing with such themes

as cooperation, protection, dialogue and good governance. Although not a legally binding document, it is intended to establish guidelines as alumni strive to meet these goals. Each association will continue with a separate agenda each year, but the regional relationship will support and share in these efforts as well as encourage regional activities that hopefully will act as a model for other kinds of regional cooperation at the government level. This process began with a regional conference in October 2011 in Zagreb, Croatia, that addressed the future of Afghanistan and the contribution that Southeast Europe countries can make with a follow-up conference in Podgorica, Montenegro, on this same theme in January 2012. Both conferences were assisted by alumni as organizers and participants. In-country alumni events will include alumni from the region, when possible, to share their expertise and experience. A regional newsletter is planned in which alumni can address important issues and exchange information. A rotating presidency will oversee association activities, with Montenegro chairing the first presidency and Macedonia holding the vice presidency. In a region where political tensions still exist, such an initiative by Marshall Center alumni is no small achievement. It speaks to their willingness to look forward to and work for a better future, not just for their individual countries, but as part of Southeast Europe and the greater European community. □