

Varna Declaration of SEE Presidents

For the Record: 21 May 2005, Saturday.

Cultural Corridors of Southeast Europe Common Past and Shared Heritage - A Key to Future Partnership

Varna Declaration
21 May 2005

We, Heads of State and other leaders of the South-East Europe region, met in Varna (20-21 May, 2005) within the framework of the Regional Forum 'Cultural Corridors of South East Europe' organised under the auspices of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria Mr. Georgi Parvanov, the Director-General of UNESCO Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe Mr. Terry Davis:

a) Reaffirming the ideals and principles laid down in the Charter of the United Nations and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

b) Recognising the role of the cultural heritage of the countries of South East Europe as a key element for strengthening regional and global cooperation; their heritage in all its manifestations must be preserved, enhanced and handed on to future generations as a record of human experience and aspirations, so as to foster creativity in all its diversity and to inspire genuine dialogue among cultures (UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001);

c) Recalling the relevant conventions adopted under the auspices of UNESCO, in particular the Convention on the means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970); the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), the Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (2001); the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), and under the auspices of the Council of Europe, in particular the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (1985), the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (1992), and the European Landscape Convention (2000);

d) Acknowledging the complementary roles and objectives of the international institutions and organisations participating in the Forum, and in particular:

UNESCO's core mandate, which includes fostering international and regional cooperation and standard-setting in the field of culture, particularly through the preservation and enhancement of intangible and tangible cultural heritage as a source of dialogue and development;

the Council of Europe's role in setting standards and supporting networks (cf. Resolution (98) 4 on Cultural Routes), particularly the ongoing joint action with the European Commission for the integrated rehabilitation of the architectural and archaeological heritage (the Regional Programme for Cultural and Natural Heritage in South East Europe);

the European Union's role in formulating programmes and initiatives for balanced sustainable regional development, aiming at social cohesion with strong emphasis on the potential of cultural and cultural heritage resources for growth and employment opportunities;

e) Welcoming the reconstruction of the Mostar Bridge (2004), which is an eloquent symbol of reconciliation in the region;

f) Emphasising that this Declaration is in continuity with the Message from Ohrid adopted by the Regional Forum on the Dialogue among Civilizations (2003) and the Tirana Summit Declaration on Inter-religious and Inter-ethnic Dialogue (2004);

g) Noting the fortunate coincidence of our meeting in Varna with the World Day of Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development (21 May), proclaimed by the United Nations in 2002;

2. We hereby declare that:

a) The region is developing a new confidence and capability, creating common space for dialogue, exchange and

agreement, in which culture plays an increasingly important role;

- b) The rich cultural heritage of South East Europe is an essential element of global cultural diversity; it makes a vital contribution to European and regional identity, especially in the context of European integration;
- c) The cultural heritage of our countries constitutes an invaluable resource for sustainable cultural, economic and social development, particularly through an innovative approach to cultural tourism in the spirit of the International Cultural Tourism Charter (ICOMOS 1999);
- d) The protection, presentation and interpretation of intangible and tangible cultural heritage should foster mutual understanding and respect for the heritage of others;
- e) The knowledge society, and information and communication technologies, have created opportunities for strengthening the role of cultural heritage in fostering dialogue both within the region and beyond it;
- f) Revealing and making accessible the cultural heritage of South East Europe in its proper context will highlight the importance of the region and its contribution to the cultural heritage of the world;
- g) The historical links and axes of inter-cultural dialogue and exchange of ideas, beliefs, knowledge and skills, as well as cultural goods and expressions, have given rise to a unique network of cultural corridors and cultural routes in South East Europe, which deserve to be identified, preserved, sustainably used and promoted;

3. And we commit to:

- a) facilitate the setting up of a Regional Network, with the participation of national and international experts, building on the experience gained in preparing the Forum in Varna, and having a mandate to develop a conceptual and operational Strategy for identifying, preserving, sustainably using and promoting cultural corridors, and an Action Plan for its practical implementation through integrated regional policies and actions;
- b) facilitate the creation of a regional framework of institutional cooperation in the field of cultural corridors and cultural heritage;
- c) contribute to the promotion of cultural heritage and cultural corridors within the region using modern dissemination technologies, in cooperation with the European Institute of Cultural Routes, Luxembourg, and other specialist institutions;
- d) encourage cooperation concerning ways and means of promoting and protecting intangible cultural heritage;
- e) promote urgent measures for the protection of cultural heritage at risk within the region, including continuing action to counter the illicit traffic in cultural property;
- f) foster the improvement of management skills and structures to support the cultural heritage and creative activity and so enhance the status of artists in the region;
- g) encourage concerted action for the balanced sustainable development of cultural heritage, including cultural tourism, through partnerships between the public and private sectors and civil society;
- h) promote intercultural education as a means of fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and awareness of the rich cultural diversity of the region, creating new opportunities for communication, exchange, networking and interaction;
- i) use the potential of relevant programmes and frameworks of UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the European Union, ICOMOS and other international organisations, financial institutions and countries outside the region to intensify cooperation in the field of culture in South East Europe;

4. In conclusion, we

- a) Welcome the proposal of President Stipe Mesic to host the next regional high-level forum in Croatia (2006), on the subject of science;
- b) Support the presentation to the participants in the Forum in Croatia for adoption a Strategy and Action Plan for the Cultural Corridors, drafted by the members of the regional expert network, with the assistance of Bulgaria as organiser of this summit, the new host country of Croatia and the international organisations;
- c) Note the proposals for subsequent regional high-level forums (2007) made by Romania (Sibiu) on multiculturalism as a bridge between cultural heritage and culture of the future, and of Greece on waterways and

their role in the propagation of civilization.

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