

33 representatives of 18 States of the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea region and the Arab States have met in Istanbul in the UNESCO Regional Meeting on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage from 25 – 27 October 2010. They came namely from Albania, Algeria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and the Ukraine. The participants discussed the Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, adopted in 2001, and its implications, as well as the situation of submerged heritage and of underwater archaeology in their regions.

The participants of the meeting thank UNESCO, the Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture Agency and Mr Hakan Oniz for its organization and greet the success of Turkey in the field of underwater archaeology.

They furthermore stress the importance of the underwater cultural heritage for the cultural identity of the region and its immense historic value. All participating States claim significant marine and internal waters, which are rich in sunken cultural sites. Over the centuries thousands of ships, structures and entire cities and even whole landscapes have been submerged. Some sites date back from some thousands of years, others give testimony to more recent important historic events. But all of them are of highest value for the common knowledge about the past.

For many decades, treasure hunters, pillagers and industrial activities have indiscriminately destroyed such cultural vestiges. In consequence, many States have lost forever significant cultural legacies, which held important keys to secrets about the cultures of ancient civilizations or historic events.

Recommendations

To improve this situation and the advance of underwater archaeology and in a spirit of cooperation and common understanding the participants of the meeting therefore:

1. *Call* for the improvement of research and protection of underwater cultural heritage in their countries;
2. *Call* for the adoption of a common regional approach to the protection of the underwater cultural heritage to jointly ensure its research and preservation;
3. *Encourage* the elaboration of regional plans for the development and implementation of policies for the protection and responsible sustainable management of this heritage by national authorities and institutions assisted by UNESCO;
4. *Call* for regional cooperation in capacity building and the creation of a network of recognized professionals to facilitate their interchange;
5. *Call* for the enforcement of regional cooperation in the establishment of inventories of underwater cultural heritage to ensure a common approach to inventorization;
6. *Call* to UNESCO for assistance in the exchange of contact information of professionals in the field, information on competent authorities and the identification or invitation of trainees and trainers;

7. *Stress* the importance of national rules requiring the approval of national competent authorities for interventions on underwater cultural heritage sites based on scientific impact studies, including activities only incidentally affecting these sites and areas where such sites could only possibly be located;
8. *Stress* the importance of making it compulsory for entities undertaking activities under water (coast guards, navy, dredging services, fisheries monitoring, oceanographic services, etc.) to confidentially communicate information on heritage found or on heritage related activities to the competent national authorities in accordance with national law;
9. *Call* for the organization of awareness raising meetings and trainings, also for coast line and maritime developers, national navy services and other services involved in the management of underwater resources in order to inform them about the importance of submerged archaeological sites;
10. *Encourage* the establishment of UNESCO chairs for underwater archaeology;
11. *Call* for the organization of follow-up meetings in the biennium 2012/2013 on the implementation of the 2001 Convention and the elaboration of common research projects.