

**Regional Forum on
The Cultural Corridors of South East Europe:
Common Past and Shared Heritage, a Key to Future
Partnership
Varna, Bulgaria, 20 to 21 May 2005**

VARNA DECLARATION

Adopted at the Regional Forum on The Cultural Corridors of South East Europe: Common Past and Shared Heritage, a Key to Future Partnership Varna, Bulgaria, 20 to 21 May 2005

8. We, Heads of State and other leaders and representatives of South East Europe, meeting 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;
 - a) Welcoming *the reconstruction of the Mostar Bridge (2004), which is of reconciliation in the region;*
 - b) *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);
 - c) *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;

9. 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;

10. and 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;

11. In conclusion, we

- a) Welcome the proposal of President Stipe Mesić 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 adopting 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 by Greece on 'Intercultural Encounters on Maritime, River and Lake Routes of South East Europe' and their role for the Dialogue of Civilizations.

21 May 2005

Koichiro Matsuura
Director-General of UNESCO
Address on the occasion of the
Regional Forum on The Cultural Corridors of South East Europe:
Common Past and Shared Heritage, a Key to Future Partnership
Varna, Bulgaria, 20 May 2005

It is a great pleasure for me to be here with you today in Varna for this Summit, which represents a new opportunity to strengthen the cooperation we have sought to build up with the Heads of State of the region in order to create a genuine platform for dialogue among the cultures and civilizations of South East Europe.

The high-level encounter on the strengthening of cooperation in South East Europe that took place at UNESCO Headquarters in April 2002 was undoubtedly the starting point for renewed dialogue among the countries of the region. Since then, this dialogue has been pursued most fruitfully, first in Ohrid in 2003 and then in Tirana last year. I am very pleased with the progress that has been achieved over the last three years. I should like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all Heads of State of the region, and especially those present here today who, by their regular attendance at these Summits, have shown how much importance they assign to this process.

I believe that the dialogue has now been placed on a sound and lasting footing and that the time has now come to anchor it in more practical and targeted actions, and to think about launching a series of annual meetings on specific issues that can solidify the dialogue around unifying themes. This is one of the reasons why I so readily concurred with the proposal of our host, President Georgi Parvanov, to give concrete extension to our previous encounters by including on the political agenda of the Heads of State a project based on cultural cooperation and devoted, by definition, to dialogue.

I am especially glad that at this decisive stage we are able to benefit from the support of regional cooperation organizations, particularly the Council of Europe and the European Commission. The project that brings us together, if it is to succeed, indeed demands a steadfast commitment to cooperation and to the sharing of expertise and resources. Today, the Heads of State of South East Europe are assembled not only to issue a strong reaffirmation of their determination to cooperate in peace and dialogue -

as they did in Ohrid and Tirana - but also to sign up to a concrete programme that places culture at the heart of development and dialogue.

This is a moment of historic significance for UNESCO - which has always argued that culture had a pivotal role in international relations - since, today, it is Heads of State who are declaring before the world their support for this approach and thus giving it exemplary importance and impact. I am confident that the Varna process will be contagious in the most beneficial sense of the word. For we are living in times when each and every one of us is becoming aware of the increasing role of culture in the daily lives of peoples and individuals as a mirror of their identity. As a result, by not only reaching into every nook and cranny of daily life but also becoming an increasingly central feature of international relations, culture is generating a new geopolitical strategy or paradigm.

Your engagement is forcefully inscribing upon the political agenda a development that is here for all to see and that is gathering momentum in the age of globalization. You have understood the awesome power of culture, which can be divisive if used badly, or a tool for peace and progress when placed in the service of mutual understanding.

I am also very pleased to see that this Varna meeting coincides with the World Day of Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2002. It is particularly appropriate that this symbolic coincidence is occurring in a region with such extraordinary ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity, something that has long been a source of vulnerability for it, but which today is among its strengths.

The promotion of the "fruitful diversity of cultures" is enshrined in UNESCO's Constitution as one of its core mandates. This involves the recognition of the equal dignity of each culture and the mobilization of all cultures' energies in the service of future-oriented projects.

As is the case in any region that has a rich history, memory is a bridge between past and future, based on the traces of a remarkably varied heritage, each part of which is an indispensable building block for a self-respecting society. Heritage is not the result of the slow sedimentation of successive cultures and civilizations in a given location. Nor is it the fruit of a selective reading of history whereby certain periods would fall into oblivion while others would be highlighted simply because they were considered more glorious or productive. Heritage is the daily encounter with the past and the discovery of a key that opens the doors to a full understanding of today's world, thereby shaping a clearer vision of the

future. Heritage should not be taken as meaning a collection of cultural landscapes, sites, monuments or objects. It is not confined to these material components, however valuable they may be.

Heritage also stands for such practices, representations, expressions, and forms of knowledge and know-how - as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated with them - as communities, groups or individuals recognize as belonging to their cultural heritage. This intangible heritage, handed down from generation to generation, is in a perpetual state of re-creation by those communities and groups in accordance with their *milieu*, their interaction with nature and their history, and it gives them a sense of identity and continuity, thus contributing to the promotion of respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.

UNESCO has sought strongly to affirm the multi-faceted value of heritage, adopting the World Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1972 and the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003. It is gratifying for UNESCO to observe that the complementarity of these two Conventions is today widely recognised and that heritage protection, whether in the tangible or intangible domain, is in demand the world over.

Accordingly, there is a growing public outcry whenever one of the treasures of humanity's heritage disappears, be it as a result of natural disaster, war or some other cause. It is this watchful universal awareness that will in future guarantee the survival of our heritage on the international, regional, national or local levels. But it will only work if each of us recognizes that another person's heritage is also a part of our own and of that of humankind in its entirety.

Where regions are concerned, it should by rights be even easier to build up regional awareness through a closer and more detailed knowledge of neighbouring cultures. And yet the paradox is that this is not always the case, with the wounds of strife clouding our memory or effacing whole segments of it.

This is the type of situation where the "Routes" or "Cultural Itineraries" approach can point to a way forward, by revealing riches that others do not know exist - even though, locally, they have been revered since time immemorial. The concept of a "Route" is based on the observation that encounters among peoples and among cultures are beneficial. It highlights the cross-fertilization of knowledge and know-how, of ideas, beliefs and representations by integrating the fundamental data of the natural and cultural, tangible and intangible heritage. It

identifies the dynamics that, in times of crisis and in times of well-being, have set these interactions in motion. In addition, on the basis of an analysis over time, it makes for a better assessment of the potential and the modalities for intercultural dialogue in today's pluralistic societies, while at the same time avoiding a return to past disagreements that could once again be our downfall. The Routes not only offer a history and geography of intercultural dialogue down through the ages, but also contribute to forward-looking reflection. Indeed, the encounters and interactions that today's world tends to overlook are actually a stark reminder to us that intercultural processes were happening long before we started discussing them.

In South East Europe, long referred to as the "Balkans" - a word that means "mountain" in Turkish - it is easy to appreciate that, except for a few major Routes such as the "Via Egnatia", the routes make up a maze of corridors that are scattered and unconnected. This concept of "cultural corridors", coined in 1974 by Rezvan Theodorescu, is the expression of a reality that is particular to this region where, as Herder put it in his famous aphorism: "history is but geography on the move".

Each of these corridors has its own specificities, born out of the meeting of remote or neighbouring cultures in an environment generally disinclined to exchange and sharing. Each of them therefore represents an opportunity to open up new horizons for mutual understanding, thanks to a broader vision of cultural heritage. Out of the secrets of past encounters that occurred spontaneously but sporadically, we should now seek to discover an alchemy of encounter that could be of benefit to the entire region of South East Europe.

I have no doubt that the Summit of Varna is set to transform the corridors of yesteryear into the primary axes of tomorrow's intercultural communication. While I do not wish to dwell on the detailed modalities for such a strategy, some key ideas are contained in the document prepared by UNESCO and sent to you a few days ago by President Parvanov in an attachment to the Draft Statement in order to provide clearer insights into the issues to be covered at this Summit.

Allow me to assure the Heads of State that UNESCO stands ready to support them without fail in the pursuit of this fine project, whose appeal is more than a passing enticement, but a renewed invitation to enduring dialogue.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1. Introduction

The Varna Forum is part of a series of meetings organized over the recent years at UNESCO's initiative or with the Organization's participation, including the High-Level conference on Strengthening Co-operation in South-East Europe (Paris, April 2002), the Regional Forum on Dialogue between Cultures and Civilization (Ohrid, August, 2003), the Conference of Culture Ministers at the inauguration of the Mostar Bridge (July, 2004) and the Regional Summit on Inter-Religious and Inter-Ethnic Dialogue in South-East Europe (Tirana, December, 2004).

By meeting in Varna, the Heads of State of the countries of South-East Europe once again demonstrate their resolve to consider this sub-region a space for encounters, exchanges and creating new ties of solidarity in which culture plays a pre-eminent role. In this way, they hope to send to Europe as well as the entire world an optimistic message based on the peaceful forces of culture through a unifying project of cooperation.

More specifically, they hope to mobilize, for the benefit of the subregion, the vital forces of heritage -- understood in the largest meaning of the term -- as a source of dialogue and development. Heritage is not limited to monuments and their environment; this notion encompasses ensembles, sites and cultural landscapes as well as live performances and expressions. In this way, heritage permeates cross-border cultural routes and itineraries.

Moreover, given that the day slated for the adoption of the Varna Declaration coincides with the World Day of Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development (21 May), it would be judicious to take advantage of this opportunity.

2. Objectives

In this context, the Varna Forum constitutes a decisive step. The Forum will have to underline the need to promote understanding among peoples and communities of the sub-region avoiding withdrawing behind one's cultural identity via stereotypes and prejudices. In this spirit, the role of culture as a common component of identity, integration and stability in the sub-region must be enhanced. It will be important to define this positive role, and, from the outset, to denounce the instrumentalization of culture

for partisan ends and the negative consequences that culture can engender in peacetime as well as in wartime.

More specifically, it will be necessary to emphasize the polysemantic nature of the term “cultural heritage” by underlining the particularly rich transformations and mingling in spaces of intense contact. Thus considered, heritage encompasses a wide range of concerns, namely the ways in which societies relate to and protect their environment, and express their solidarity or existence through literature, the arts and various other forms of creation. In this way, the sub-region’ s profuse creativity manifested by its exceptional cultural diversity will also be highlighted.

The commitments made by the Heads of State should be expressed in the Declaration and its action plan, which will be complemented by a timetable for the plan’ s implementation.

3. Strategy

The work and projects on cultural corridors must benefit from UNESCO’ s experience in the **Routes of Dialogue** programmes, for it was in the framework of the World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-97) that these intercultural projects were launched. The “Route” concept is based on the beneficial effects resulting from encounters among different peoples and cultures. It highlights the exchange, in terms of knowledge and expertise, of ideas, beliefs, performances, by integrating fundamental aspects of the cultural and natural heritage as well as the tangible and intangible heritage. It also recognizes the dynamics, which, in periods of prosperity and periods of crisis, have determined such interaction. This in turn enables us, by means of diachronic analysis, to evaluate more accurately the chances and means of achieving genuine intercultural dialogue in today’ s multi-cultural societies, without getting entangled in the debates of the past. These “Routes” offer not only a historic and geographic overview of intercultural dialogue over the centuries, but they also contribute to future debate: the encounters and interactions, which have been somewhat forgotten today, illustrate that intercultural processes predate the current debate on the subject.

From the outset, it will be necessary to clarify the concept of “cultural corridor”, which has various meanings according to the authors who apply it to South-East Europe. In order to be operative, this concept must be understood unequivocally by all the participants of the Varna Forum. It must help to bring down the barriers of culture by placing it at the heart of current exchanges and the processes of development. It should be easy to eliminate restrictive and dangerous definitions: a corridor can be neither a dead end nor a narrow strip winding its way through hostile regions.

Similarly, the intangible and multifarious nature of these corridors should be taken into account to ensure that the concept of cultural corridors does not go astray by drifting towards “complete cultural and tourist products”

On one hand, the Forum must foster a common perception of this concept by highlighting its distinctiveness in relation to “Routes” and “cultural itineraries”, and on the other hand, it must enhance the interaction between heritage and dialogue by placing them in perspective with regard to history and collective memory in order to create new spaces for communication and exchange. Consequently, these corridors should be spaces devoted to renewed dialogue not only between national and local authorities, or between artists, craftspeople, international media professionals and tourists, but also, and especially, between local and national communities within the same country. It goes without saying that the voices of these communities, whatever their common ties (ethnic, religious, linguistic...), must be heard and their common stakes taken into account. If this is not the case, these corridors could lead to new conflicts rather than enhanced dialogue.

It would therefore be advisable to:

- **Propose a broader approach to corridors and Routes**, in line with the recommendations of the expert meetings in Madrid (24- 25 November 1994), the regional meeting on cultural landscapes in Eastern Europe (September - October 1999), and with the work undertaken by ICOMOS (Spain) and UNESCO concerning the intangible heritage.
- **Promote an integrated vision of cultural heritage under all its aspects**, as a bearer of history and identity to be conserved, a resource and motor for sustainable development, and a tool for intercultural dialogue.
- **Emphasize the role of creativity**, to illustrate the rich cultural diversity of the sub-region today, and to highlight both similarities and particularities.
- **Increase the spaces devoted to intercultural mediation**, encounters, festivals, museums, interpretation centres, galleries and foundations as spaces enabling the public to discover the entire range of the heritage and creativity of the sub-region. To achieve this goal, develop multi-media facilities and incorporate, in a more methodical manner, written and audiovisual media.
- **Promote innovative cultural tourism**, as a vehicle of exchange and a tool for heritage preservation and creative diversity, which can contribute to a better mutual understanding of the sub-region and to its sustainable development.

4. **Orientations to Guide the implementation of the Declaration of the Heads of State – Suggestion for a concerted approach at the sub-regional level to proposals for inscription on the World Heritage List and on the future List of Intangible Heritage of Humanity** (cross-border sites, joint nominations of sites located in different countries within the same sub-region, enhancement of Routes and corridors etc). It will be necessary to consult reference documents and standard-setting instruments, such as 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 for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) and the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), and reference documents of the Council of Europe, such as the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (1985) and the Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (1992).

- **Identification of spaces** (museums, theatres, cultural centres, parks, etc), of **themes** (co-publishing of anthologies of literary works by authors from the sub-region, co-production of music and film projects etc) and **events** (festivals, exhibitions, book fairs, art or crafts fairs etc.) and **live performances** and expressions related to cultural corridors that could contribute to creating a harmonious cultural scene.

In line with these objectives, one could:

- **Demonstrate, by means of an integrated approach, the heritage potential of the corridors and other spaces of contact**, previously redefined, taking care to avoid major discrepancies between examples of tangible and intangible heritage or discrimination between different categories of heritage (for example, there exists a project on “Monastery Route” but one could also propose a “Mosque Route”). Given the varying state of available documentation, it would certainly be worthwhile to explore the possibility of creating thematic databases beyond the national level to embrace the heritage of the entire region in all its diversity (sites, music, dance, arts, crafts, spiritual traditions, clothing and cooking traditions etc.) taking special care to include the heritage of minorities.
- **Make a diagnosis of the state of conservation of cultural heritage sites**, ensembles and monuments and define the priorities in terms of conservations of cultural landscapes by referring to the orientations of the World Heritage Centre; undertake inventories of the intangible

cultural heritage found along the envisaged corridors and determine which elements require particular attention so that they can contribute to the enhancement these corridors.

- **List the most vulnerable forms of the intangible cultural heritage** in order to ensure its safeguarding and conservation for future generations. Encourage the states of South-East Europe to ratify the Convention of 2003 and to prepare candidatures for the lists of intangible heritage established by that instrument.
- **Establish, or link via a network, programmes devoted to heritage conservation and enhancement of heritage as well as awareness-raising** for all administrators, political and cultural actors by improving the relevant teaching materials. Adapt the training programmes for the actors and operators in the field of cultural tourism by defining cross-border thematic itineraries and by associating logos to these corridors with the assistance of the sub-regional coordination committees.
- **Identify or create poles of excellence with the assistance of UNESCO Chairs and establish network links** among research and teaching centres based on a series of themes to be selected (the role of contemporary creation as a tool for intercultural communication; the role of history in enhancing understanding of contemporary interaction; the role of the written and oral literary tradition in the awareness of a common heritage; religious and linguistic diversity etc.). In this context, it is advisable to produce a series of printed or audio-visual documents in the various national languages. This series should be designed for the entire sub-region, thereby avoiding a nationalist position. Clearly, it could be used in a formal or informal educational context.
- **Propose events related to the cultural corridors project in the framework of World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development (21 May)**, by defining unifying themes that will produce fruitful encounters between visitors and the local populations and reinforced cooperation between cities on the basis of common cultural policies. Encourage exchange programmes between young people from different countries, particularly through artist residencies, volunteer programmes for monument restoration or archaeological excavations in the framework of the “World Heritage in Young Hands” programme or “The Olive Tree Route project.
- **Establish a timetable for launching some cultural corridors in an integrated approach - devoted to the principal themes already mentioned:** archaeological zones, religious heritage, civil heritage, particularly vernacular and World Heritage Sites, with particular attention to their multifarious or intangible components and to their enhancement by a type of tourism that is respectful of the fragility

of these ensembles. For symbolic reasons, it would be advisable to create a new itinerary based on the unifying theme of “bridges” – with the appropriate accompanying literature – given the richness of the region in this regard, from Antiquity through the Ottoman period down to the present day. Another suggestion: the creation of one or several regional corridors to highlight the components belonging to one or several aspects of the intangible cultural heritage that reflect the communities living along these corridors today.

NOTE:

1. Prepared by UNESCO as an intellectual contribution to the Regional Forum “Cultural Corridors in South East Europe, Common Past and Shared Heritage: a Key to Future Partnership” in May 2005.
www.unesco.org/culture