



**CULTURAL HERITAGE:
A BRIDGE TOWARDS A SHARED FUTURE**
**The Fifth Ministerial Conference on Cultural Heritage
in South-Eastern Europe**

Bucharest, Romania, the 20th of September, 2008

BUCHAREST DECLARATION

The Fifth Joint Declaration of the Ministers Responsible for Culture
in South-Eastern Europe and Italy,
concerning the Enhancement of Cultural Heritage
for supporting Dialogue, Integration, and Sustainable Development

I. We, the Ministers participating in the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe, on the topic “Cultural Heritage – a Bridge Towards a Shared Future”, organised under the auspices of the Government of Romania and with the support of UNESCO:

Considering our participation in these annual Ministerial Conferences as an expression of our commitment to strengthening a spirit of cooperation, dialogue and mutual understanding between our countries and peoples; as well as an opportunity to reaffirm our strong will to preserve the richness and diversity of our shared cultural legacy, with a view to promote it as a treasure of the entire world;

Reaffirming in full the contents, objectives and activities included in the Mostar Declaration and Action Plan, in the Venice Declaration, in the Ohrid Declaration, and in the Zadar Declaration, respectively approved by the First (Mostar, 2004), Second (Venice, 2005), Third (Ohrid, 2006), and Fourth (Zadar, 2007) Ministerial Conferences on Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe;

Recalling the principles embodied in the Ohrid Declaration (August 2003), in the Tirana Declaration (December 2004), in the Varna Declaration (May 2005), in the Opatija Declaration (June 2006), in the Bucharest Declaration (June 2007), and in the Athens Declaration (June 2008) adopted by the Heads of State of the South-East European countries within the framework of the Regional Forum on Dialogue Among Civilisations;

Renewing our appreciation for the generous contribution made by the Italian government to the Trust Fund for cultural heritage in South-Eastern Europe and encouraging the continuation of the Italian support to the Trust Fund, as well as the extension of the Trust Fund to other possible contributors;

Commending the efforts of UNESCO, especially through the Section for Culture of the UNESCO Venice Office – Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe (BRESCE) in support to all activities related to these annual Ministerial Conferences, as well as its general commitment to the preservation and promotion of South-East European cultural heritage;

II. *Underscore* that:

- a. Since the first Ministerial Conference on Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe was held, the regional scenario concerning the protection, management and promotion of cultural heritage underwent substantial improvements. To mention but a few:
 - Almost all the signatory countries to this Declaration ratified most recent international Conventions in the field of culture (with special reference to the UNESCO Conventions on: the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage; the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage; the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions; as well as to the Council of Europe's European Landscape Convention) and are now taking measures for their implementation. In this regard, efforts must be stepped up to ensure effective application of these instruments by the Parties.
 - Countries in the region saw a significant increase in the international recognition of the value and specificity of their cultural heritage. Factors such as the progressive stabilisation of the region after the events of the past decade, the advancement of the European integration, the inception of substantial development processes, created enabling conditions for the promotion of culture as a powerful tool for building mutual understanding.
 - Similarly, the last few years saw a rapid growth in the international production, consumption and exchange of cultural goods and services, especially due to the boost of digitisation processes. At the same time, the role of culture in tourism and allied industries also started to express its full potential in terms of fostering development gains.
- b. However, such and other improvements often failed to keep pace with the velocity of change, and to fully tap the potential of culture as a central feature in ensuring sustainable human and economic development. In particular, the increase of culture as a central dimension of development has not been fully accompanied by an analogous raise in its financing and political attention. Constraints in available resources, coupled with the failure by many to recognise the potential of culture as a development factor, too often contributed to confine culture at the periphery of political agendas. In fact, culture frequently remains a residual issue, at both national and regional level, proving

that the gap between its importance and its requirements remains far from being bridged.

III. *Hereby adopt* the following Declaration:

1. The rapid pace of evolution in all aspects of human coexistence, at both global and local level, imposes culture as an indispensable resource for the understanding and management of change. This holds especially true in a region as South-Eastern Europe still characterised by profound transition processes, involving the political, economical, and social spheres. For this reason, we renew our commitment to the enhancement of culture as a priority field for reinforcing cooperation between our countries, in both bilateral and multilateral dimensions.
2. In this regard, culture shall be intended as the continuous exchange, forming, and consolidation of spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features, thus promoting values of inclusiveness, openness, and acceptance of the other on a ground of mutual respect. Such concept of culture shall lead to extend our cooperation from the field of heritage to a broader action involving the protection and promotion of cultural diversity and creativity as indispensable resources for supporting reciprocal knowledge, dialogue, and mutual understanding between our countries and peoples, as well as sustainable development processes.
3. In this sense, these annual Ministerial Conferences confirm to be a privileged forum for strengthening regional cultural cooperation, and we strongly recommend their continuation in the years to come. Moreover, we express appreciation for the results so far achieved through the activities intended as operational follow-up to the Conferences, encouraging their further enhancement according to the objectives and principles embodied in the joint Declarations approved by the present and the previous Ministerial meetings.
4. Nonetheless, in approaching the conclusion of the first five years of activity since the first Ministerial Conference was held, a more thorough assessment of accomplished results seems to be necessary, coupled with a more precise identification of remaining bottlenecks as well as of new challenges ahead. To this end, we propose the revision of the Action Plan approved by the Mostar Conference, so as to update its objectives

and action lines in the light of the resources and constraints, assets and shortcomings so far emerged. Such revised document shall be subject to the approval of the Sixth Ministerial Conference in 2009, and serve as basic reference for future activities.

5. Mindful of the importance of ensuring an operational outcome to the indications of our annual meetings, we renew our appreciation for the generous contribution by the Government of Italy to the Trust Fund for Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe. The Italian support remains a corner-stone in sustaining this regional cooperation framework, and we encourage its continuation within the overall process of integration, dialogue and sustainable development in this region. At the same time, we favour the extension of the Trust Fund to other possible contributors.
6. The Italian support shall be interpreted as an encouragement for strengthening the respective commitment by each country in the region to enhance cultural heritage, hereby including the increase of available resources within national budgets. In fact, the goals and principles embodied by these annual Ministerial Declarations can only be achieved if the protection and promotion of cultural heritage is integrated within the priorities of national political agendas, and provided that congruous resources are allocated to this end.
7. Consequently, and as a concrete sign of our intention to proceed in this direction, we propose that future activities at country level accomplished under the Trust Fund for Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe shall be co-financed by the beneficiary countries, also in order to create a synergy aimed at maximising their impact.
8. At the same time, it is our auspice and intention to enhance the trans-national and cross-border dimension of operational activities related to these annual Ministerial conferences, so as to make of them an even more effective instrument at the service of dialogue and development. Similarly, intra-regional cooperation, including transfer of knowledge and the sharing of good practices, shall remain a cross-cutting priority.
9. Within this framework, we express appreciation for the development in the signatory countries of centres of excellence in the various fields of cultural heritage safeguarding and management. We remind in this sense of the International Centre for Underwater Archaeology in Zadar, as well as of the Regional Centre for Digitization

of Cultural Heritage in Skopje, which was inaugurated in March 2008 in the presence of UNESCO Director-General. As a further step in this direction, we welcome the creation of the Centre for Restoration and Conservation of Monuments in Tirana, convinced that this institution will greatly contribute to support training and capacity building in this specific sector at the regional level.

10. Mindful of the pivotal role played by culture as a catalyst for creativity, we encourage the launch of capacity-building, training, and research activities focusing on the impact of culture and creativity over the human and economic development of our societies. Such objective shall be pursued through the identification and exchange of good practices between the signatory countries, bearing in mind the relevant policies, programmes and instruments set forth at European level. We also encourage the launch of training and capacity building programmes on the economics of culture, to be supported whereas possible by the Trust-Fund for cultural heritage in South-Eastern Europe.
11. Similarly, all states here present greatly appreciate the support given by the Section for Culture of UNESCO Office in Venice (BRESCE), to the organisation of Regional Seminars of Experts of South-Eastern Europe on intangible cultural heritage, which took place in Arbanassi (Bulgaria, June 2007) and Safranbolu (Turkey, May 2008). While emphasizing that the implementation of UNESCO programmes in the field of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) represents a common goal to all participants in this conference, we attach great importance to the creation of a regional network of experts aimed at enhancing coordination for the identification, documentation, research, preservation, promotion, and transmission of the ICH to future generations. To the same end, we commend the establishment in Bulgaria of a UNESCO Category II Regional Center in the field of ICH, as well as the establishment of UNESCO Chairs on the same subject, as announced during the Safranbolu Seminar.
12. In order to achieve the above-mentioned objectives, a closer coordination between follow-up activities shall be sought, in a way to ensure their overall coherence and responsiveness to the underlying strategy promoted by the Ministerial declarations. Such coordination shall be pursued both with the support by UNESCO through the Culture Section of UNESCO Office in Venice (BRESCE), which will continue to operate as focal point of this overall cooperation framework, and by means of a more active and

regular involvement of the specific International Working Group (IWG) created further to the Second Ministerial Conference (Venice, 2005).

13. As a first step in this direction, we recommend to convene annual mid-term meetings of the International Working Group, to be organised between the Ministerial conferences, with the purpose of offering an effective consultation forum for the coordination of activities and the preparation of following Ministerial meetings.
14. Finally, we express appreciation for the proposal by the Government of Montenegro to host the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe, in 2009, and accept its invitation to participate.