



## **CULTURAL HERITAGE A BRIDGE TOWARDS A SHARED FUTURE**

### **Extraordinary Session of the International Working Group (Sofia, Bulgaria – 20 March 2009)**

The International Working Group, coordination and consultation body within the framework of the annual Ministerial Conferences on Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe, held an extraordinary session in Sofia on 20 March 2009, organized by the Ministry of Culture of Bulgaria in collaboration with the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Bulgarian National Commission for UNESCO, and with the support of UNESCO.

Representatives of the ministries responsible for culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia participated in the session, together with representatives of UNESCO (UNESCO Office in Venice – Culture Section).

Main objective of the meeting was to initiate the preparation of the sixth Ministerial Conference on Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe, to be held in Montenegro in November 2009, with a view at advancing proposals for the definition of a new Action Plan aimed at enhancing cultural cooperation in the region, to be presented and approved by the Ministerial Conference.

In conclusion of the meeting, the International Working Group unanimously approved the following recommendations:

## **Sofia Recommendations**

### **Cultural cooperation in South-Eastern Europe: a strategic framework for future challenges**

The countries, people, and communities from South-Eastern Europe share not only strong historical, social, and economical relations. First and foremost, they are linked by an exceptional richness and diversity of cultural expressions that have produced distinctive specificities but also deep and very fertile connections. For this reason culture remains a strategic field for international relations in South-Eastern Europe, especially comprising the following dimensions:

- 1. Culture as a platform for the enhancement of international cooperation**
- 2. Culture as a key-factor in fostering sustainable development and facing international economic crisis**
- 3. Culture as a tool for dialogue, inclusion, and mutual understanding.**

#### **1. Culture for the enhancement of international cooperation**

- i.** Culture, as the expression of knowledge, beliefs and creativity of peoples and individuals in continuous interaction, is a privileged platform for the development of peaceful and fruitful international relations. Accordingly, the priority of culture as a subject for bilateral, multilateral, and intra-regional cooperation in South-Eastern Europe shall be confirmed and possibly further strengthened.
- ii.** To this end, a closer coordination shall be sought in order to better integrate all cultural cooperation frameworks active in South-Eastern Europe, with a view at leveraging on the respective comparative advantages, creating synergies and avoiding duplication of efforts. In this sense, while acknowledging the leading political and institutional role played by the annual Forums of South-East European Heads of State, a more effective harmonisation shall be sought between the initiatives participated by the countries in the region, also with the support of UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and the European Commission.
- iii.** Similarly, the coordination between cultural cooperation initiatives in South-Eastern Europe and the cultural policies and programmes of the European Union shall be strengthened, possibly increasing the participation of UNESCO as leading international organisation for cultural cooperation in the implementation of relevant EU-funded programmes, as well as in other programmes supported by different governmental and non-governmental organisations active in the field of culture.
- iv.** The richness of South-East European cultural diversity shall be interpreted as a shared resource in terms of fostering a positive and peaceful image of the region at the international level. Therefore, besides supporting the mainstreaming of culture into development policies at the national level, efforts shall be stepped up in order to fully express the potential of culture in promoting the overall international perception of South-Eastern Europe.

- v. In this sense, the **Ministerial Conferences on Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe** shall continue to represent a privileged forum for the definition and implementation of cooperation activities, and their continuity shall be ensured. At the same time the Trust Fund for Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe, managed by UNESCO as main operational tool of the Ministerial Conferences shall be further developed into a shared instrument. To this end, and with the aim at focusing cooperation efforts on an updated set of shared targets, the following action lines are proposed:
- a. Commending the efforts of Italy as main donor to the Trust Fund and encouraging the continuation of the Italian support, all countries participating in the Ministerial Conferences shall be encouraged to directly contribute to the Trust Fund as well as to explore other possible fund-raising opportunities, in order to make of it an ever more powerful leverage of cultural cooperation in the region.
  - b. While highlighting the good results so far achieved in the implementation of the Trust Fund through country-specific activities at the national level, we encourage strengthening the trans-border and inter-regional dimensions of future activities.
  - c. With a view at promoting cultural heritage as a shared resource, we support the presentation by two or more countries from the region of common files for inscription into the UNESCO World Heritage List, as well as into the UNESCO Representative List for intangible cultural heritage.
  - d. Accordingly, the implementation of UNESCO cultural Conventions shall remain a cross-cutting priority, with special attention to their increasing relevance within cultural policies and programmes of the common European structures.
  - e. Efforts shall also be aimed at the realisation of shared communication initiatives and instruments for promoting the richness and diversity of South-East European culture. Similarly, a coordinated participation by South-East European countries in international cultural events, fairs and festivals is to be supported.
  - f. Training and the exchange of knowledge and good practices on all aspects of cultural assets management shall continue to represent an overarching priority, in order to support capacity building and the harmonisation of policies. In this sense, the creation of regional data-bases shall be encouraged aimed at sharing relevant information on specific fields of competence, according to the common priorities. As a pilot-activity, the establishment of an electronic “South-East European Culture Laws Data-Base” is encouraged, intended to facilitate the collection and sharing of main national legal instruments on the safeguarding and promotion of cultural resources.
  - g. Future activities for the enhancement of South-East European cultural heritage shall also aim at better integrating cultural and natural aspects, as complementary components necessary to the definition of effective conservation, management, and promotional tools.
  - h. Finally, and with an aim at reinforcing coordination between the Ministerial Conferences on Cultural Heritage in SEE and UNESCO activities at the national level, we recommend to ensure the representation of national Commissions for UNESCO within the delegations of all countries participating in the Conferences.

## **2. Culture as a key-factor in fostering sustainable development and facing international economic crisis**

- vi.** In a period characterised by a far-reaching and heavily-impacting international economic crisis, culture shall be seen as an ever more crucial factor in supporting sustainable development and leveraging economic growth. This is all the more true in a region characterised by an outstanding cultural richness and diversity as South-Eastern Europe.
- vii.** Considering the growing relevance of culture in development terms, the scope of future efforts within cultural cooperation in South-Eastern Europe shall be extended from the field of cultural heritage to culture in a more comprehensive understanding, thereby including those aspects with a higher impact on development such as creativity and the cultural industries.
- viii.** In this sense, an integrated approach to the management of cultural resources shall be encouraged, in order to fully tap the potential of synergic interplay between cultural heritage, the living culture, and the development processes. This approach also requires a higher degree of inter-institutional cooperation, in order to better coordinate cultural programmes with the action on related areas such as tourism, education, as well as overall economic policies.
- ix.** Common efforts shall also be stepped-up in the fields of training, capacity building, and exchange of good practices on the integrated management of cultural resources, with special attention to the synergic interaction between conservation and promotion of cultural heritage with the enhancement of creativity, cultural tourism, and cultural industries. Possible actions in this field may include the establishment of an annual South-East European award for the best practice in cultural heritage management.
- x.** Consequently, future action within the Ministerial Conferences on Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe shall focus on a more effective mainstreaming of culture into national and international development strategies. This objective shall be also pursued via a more effective involvement of economical stakeholders, with special emphasis on the active participation of entrepreneurs and industries active in cultural productions.
- xi.** The role of culture in supporting sustainable development shall also be reflected in the cooperation with and between the local communities and local government agencies. Bearing in mind the symbiotic relation between development processes and the territories, future efforts of cultural cooperation in South-Eastern Europe shall increasingly involve actors from the local dimension, ensuring their active participation in the definition and implementation of activities as well as via specific actions aimed at supporting networking and the exchange of knowledge and good practices.

### **3. Culture as a tool for dialogue, inclusion, and mutual understanding**

- xii.** This stronger emphasis on culture as a leverage for economic development shall however not result in an underestimation of the power of culture in bridging distances between countries, peoples and communities. In this sense, international cooperation efforts shall be ever more focussed on promoting universal values of inclusion, dialogue and mutual respect.
- xiii.** To this end, cultural exchanges shall be encouraged between countries of South-Eastern Europe, possibly through a more active involvement of the schooling and university systems and through all level of educations. Action in this direction may include awareness raising activities about the importance of culture and cultural heritage especially targeting the younger generations.
- xiv.** The role of artists and intellectuals as promoters of positive cultural values shall also be brought to the fore within international cooperation forums, with the double objective of enriching the cooperation platforms with distinguished ideas and proposals, and of increasing the public outreach of the institutional initiatives.
- xv.** Accordingly, a closer and more active involvement of all relevant stakeholders shall be sought within regional cooperation activities. This shall include in the first place the civil society, as the main forum for the expression and enjoyment of cultural contents as well as for the practice of dialogue and mutual understanding. Secondly, common efforts shall increasingly focus on developing collaboration with the private sector, thus acknowledging its vital role in stimulating cultural production and in translating cultural components into proper development factors.
- xvi.** The enhancement of dialogue shall also be pursued by means of supporting the networking of experts from South-East European countries and their participation in joint programmes and trans-border activities. Such action will have the double objective of strengthening mutual understanding and trust, while at the same time contributing to the process of capacity building.
- xvii.** To the same end, we strongly encourage the continuation of joint efforts for the development of centres of excellence in the countries of South-Eastern Europe, specialised in the various fields of cultural heritage research, conservation and management. The activity of such centres shall also serve as a platform for training and capacity building activities at the regional level, thus offering a concrete contribution to the enhancement of dialogue and cooperation.