

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

**International Conference of Ministers responsible for Culture in South-East Europe**

Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina), 19 July 2004

### **Concept Paper**

#### **1. Background and justification**

Europe is on the way to achieving a long-term and enlarged stability. This objective is being strengthened as its South-Eastern part continues in its effort to enhance regional co-operation and the reform processes aimed at a full integration into the common European structures.

However urgent the need may be for security, stability and economic development in South-East Europe, these objectives cannot be achieved in a durable way without strengthening the social and cultural foundations on which they are based. Acknowledging the vital importance of the shared cultural heritage is thus a necessary step in order to further mutual understanding among South-East European peoples and the socio-economic development of the communities and countries of the region.

South-East Europe has rightly been called a crossroads of cultures and civilizations, where i.a. Illyrians, ancient Greece, Rome, Byzantium, Venice, the Ottoman and the Habsburg Empires have marked their influence by tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and where Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Islam and Judaism have co-existed over centuries. Their multiple influences account for a particularly rich and varied heritage that includes architectural monuments, archaeological finds, sacred sites, historic cities, sculptures, frescoes, narrative songs, epics, music, theatre, dance, precious manuscripts and documents, artefacts, oral traditions, languages, handicrafts and culinary traditions.

However, the richness and originality of South-East European cultural heritage is still facing various obstacles which threaten its conservation and hinder its proper enhancement for a sustainable development of the area. Such contradiction lies at the basis of the initiative presented here, which proposes organizing an **International Conference of Ministers responsible for culture in South-East Europe**, to be held in Mostar (Bosnia-Herzegovina) on 19 July 2004.

The event will be part of the celebrations for the opening of the Old Bridge of Mostar. Considered as one of the most impressive aesthetic and architectural achievements of the whole region, the Old Bridge on the Neretva River in Mostar was built in 1566 by accomplished architects of the Ottoman Empire. Completely destroyed during the war in 1993 by deliberate bombing, the Old Bridge ("Stari Most" in local language), has now been painstakingly reconstructed with international assistance.

The Government and Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina will celebrate the official opening ceremony of the Bridge on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2004, in the presence of a large number of Heads of State and many heads of international organizations. The timing and purpose of the conference on “**Cultural heritage: a bridge towards a shared future**” is largely inspired by this highly significant event.

## 2. Objectives

General: The general objective of the conference is to contribute to political stability, social and economic development in South-East Europe through enhancing cultural co-operation.

Specific objectives are:

- Facilitate the integration of South-East European countries into wider European structures through raising their international co-operation standards on cultural affairs.
- Focus on the potential of cultural heritage and diversity as agents of social cohesion.
- Develop cultural tourism and open it to external investors.
- Contribute to mainstreaming cultural affairs within political agendas of South-East European countries.
- Enhance co-operation on cultural affairs within the major regional organisations and cooperation initiatives.

## 3. Expected Results

The Conference will enable participating governments to act synergically for the protection and enhancement of the cultural heritage in the region. Authorities are expected to agree upon shared principles such as the acknowledgement of cultural heritage as a critical factor in economic growth and human development, which in turn would serve as the base for the promotion of specific initiatives.

Such principles will be formalized in a **Joint Declaration** to be approved by the Conference, which aims at defining joint guidelines for the enhancement of regional cultural heritage and at setting forth cultural and political premises for cross-border and inter-regional action.

The Joint Declaration will include an **Action Plan** which will contain the principles for political activity in this field, with reference to the main directives of the European Community in the field of cultural heritage and environment and to the international “restoration charters”. The Action Plan will be the main reference document for specific cross-border programmes which will be proposed by the Conference on the basis of the resources available (international, national and community). These resources would support tangible actions over the next years. Thus priorities, approach methods and interdisciplinary references will be indicated, accompanied by a first set of concrete initiatives to which new ones could be added defined on the basis of the principles set forth in the Joint Declaration.

## 4. Follow-up

The Conference is not intended as an end in itself but rather as an important occasion for defining and promoting the implementation of a regional strategy aimed at fostering integration and socio-economic development through the enhancement of South-East European cultural heritage. The Joint Declaration and the related Action Plan shall thus be considered as the operational measures defining the direction of future common action and indicating a first group of solid undertakings towards the improvement of the protection and management of regional cultural heritage.

## **5. Date and Venue**

The Conference will take place in **Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina)**, on Monday, **19 July 2004**, and will constitute one of the main events leading to the official opening ceremony of the Old Bridge of Mostar.

## **6. Modalities and Format**

The conference will take place on a single day, during which South-East European Ministers responsible for culture will agree on a framework of intra-regional and international co-operation on cultural heritage promotion and cultural tourism development.

The morning session of the conference shall include speeches by the organizers and the Ministers of participating countries. These will be followed by the presentation of the Joint Declaration and by its formal approval. The afternoon session will be attended by Experts designated by each of the participating countries and will focus on the presentation and discussion of the Action Plan.

Travel and accommodation expenses for the delegations of participating countries will be covered by the conference, according to modalities to be communicated separately. Each participating country is invited to send a 3-person delegation, composed by their responsible Minister for cultural affairs, an expert to participate in the afternoon session plus a third member.

## **7. Conference organizers**

The conference is jointly promoted and organized by the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Government of Italy, in collaboration with UNESCO and with the support of the World Bank. The City of Mostar will host the conference.

## **8. Participants and Observers**

Participants in the conference will be the Ministers responsible for culture of the recipient countries of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe: **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina,**

**Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia (the Former Yugoslav Republic of), Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro<sup>1</sup>.**

Representatives of all other partner countries<sup>2</sup> and partner organizations of the Stability Pact will be invited as observers<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> As cultural affairs are not covered by a specific federal ministry, **Serbia** and **Montenegro** will be represented each by their respective minister responsible for culture. On behalf of **Kosovo** the Special Representative of the Secretary General will be invited to participate, together with a multiethnic delegation.

<sup>2</sup> Austria; Belgium; Canada; Czech Republic; Denmark; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Hungary; Ireland; Japan; Luxembourg; The Netherlands; Norway; Poland; Portugal; Russian Federation; Slovakia; Slovenia; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; Turkey; U.S.A.; United Kingdom.

<sup>3</sup> BSEC (Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation); CEI (Central European Initiative); Council of Europe; Council of Europe Development Bank; EBRD (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development); EIB (European Investments Bank ); European Agency for Reconstruction; European Union (EU Commission, EU Council, EU Parliament); IAI (Adriatic Ionian Initiative); IFC (International Finance Corporation); IMF (International Monetary Fund); OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development); OHR (Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina); OSCE (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe); SECI (Southeast Europe Cooperative Initiative); SEECP (South East Europe Cooperation Process); Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe; UN (United Nations); UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), UNMIK (United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo).