

CULTURAL HERITAGE: A BRIDGE TOWARDS A SHARED FUTURE

Second Ministerial Conference on Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe

Venice, Italy, 25-26 November 2005

Concept Paper



1. Background and justification

On July 19 2004, in Mostar (BiH), the Italian Government and the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in cooperation with UNESCO and the World Bank, organized a conference named “Cultural Heritage – a Bridge towards a Shared Future”, which brought together the Ministers responsible for culture of all the beneficiary countries of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, the Italian Minister of Cultural Heritage and Activities and high representatives of other partner countries and organisations of the Stability Pact. Objective of the conference was to contribute to political stability, social and economic development in the Region through strengthening cultural co-operation, especially focussing on the enhancement of cultural heritage as agent of development and of social cohesion. In so doing, the Mostar event launched a new, ambitious regional co-operation process on culture and cultural heritage, whose guiding principles and action lines were indicated in the Joint Declaration and in the related Action Plan adopted by the Ministers during the conference.

In order to endorse this co-operation process with a first set of concrete resources, and thus to ensure its prosecution, in Mostar the Italian Minister of Cultural Heritage and Activity announced a contribution by the Italian Government of Euro 800,000.00, to be entrusted to the UNESCO Venice Office for the realisation of initiatives aimed at translating into practice the guidelines of the Mostar Action Plan, with a special view to fostering cultural tourism in the region. On that occasion, the Italian Minister also invited all participants to a new conference to be held in Italy in 2005.

Following up this initiative, and on the base of the above-mentioned Italian grant, the second conference of the Ministers responsible for culture in South-Eastern Europe will be organized in Venice with the support of the UNESCO Venice Office – Section for Culture and the collaboration of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage. The conference will take place in Venice, historical door to the east, seat of priceless cultural treasures and unique treasure in itself, point of encounter between European and Mediterranean cultures, and still today one of the most important international cultural centres.

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 regional co-operation on culture and cultural heritage.

Specific objectives are:

- Promote crossborder, bilateral and multilateral cooperation between central/local government agencies, for the enhancement of cultural heritage as an instrument of social, human and economic development.
- Reaffirm and reinforce the commitments included in the Mostar Declaration, in view of the definition of a regional strategy for the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage.
- Assess the achievements in the implementation of the Mostar Action Plan, and discuss/propose future initiatives.
- Enlarge the regional co-operation process on culture and cultural heritage, opening it up to new subjects and new partners (with specific attention to the role of civil society, and of local government agencies).

- Support intercultural dialogue within the region, by means of ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage and of promoting contemporary cultural productions.

3. Expected Results

The Conference will further strengthen the commitment of participating governments to enhance regional cultural cooperation. Authorities are expected to reaffirm shared principles such as the respect of cultural diversity and the acknowledgement of cultural heritage as a critical factor in economic growth and human development, as well as to agree upon future initiatives, to launch new concrete projects, and to enlarge the cooperation process to new partners.

In particular, it is expected that the Conference will lead to the approval of a joint Declaration, indicating new guidelines for the prosecution of the cooperation process started in Mostar in 2004. The document will be based on the Mostar declaration and will include an update of the Mostar Action Plan, taking into account the results so far achieved, the possible redefinition of objectives and priorities and the resources available.

The Conference will also take note of the following documents: the “Strategy for the Protection and the Enhancement of South-Eastern European Cultural Heritage”, to be presented by UNESCO; the “*Conclusions of the working table on international decentralised cooperation for the enhancement of South-Eastern European museums*”; the regulations of the “*Art Bridge Prize*”, an award dedicated to young artists from the region, promoted by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in collaboration with the UNESCO Venice Office and the Venice Biennale Foundation with the objective of supporting contemporary art in South-Eastern Europe.

Furthermore, the Conference will bring new partners on board of the regional cultural cooperation process, thus offering the chance to gather new resources for the realisation of concrete initiatives. In particular, representatives of the civil society and the local government agencies will play an important and proactive role.

Finally, the conference will assess achievements of the cooperation process launched in Mostar, fixing the route for its future development and applying to it a new, powerful thrust. It is foreseen that, during the event, the Ministers will officially agree on meeting again in 2006, and will announce the venue for next year edition of the conference.

4. Follow-up

The conference is not intended as an end in itself, but rather as a further step of a cooperation process to be prosecuted in the future, both on the operative and on the political level.

With the objective of promoting cultural cooperation in the region, in accordance with the Declaration approved by the Mostar Conference in 2004 and with the Action Plan attached to it, Italy already contributes with 800 000 Euros to the “Trust Fund for South-Eastern European Cultural Heritage”, created in 2004 at the UNESCO Venice Office. The Italian grant will be specifically allocated for the definition and realisation of a regional programme aimed at enhancing cultural heritage as a factor of socio-economic development. The programme, which will be managed and implemented by the UNESCO Venice Office, will be composed of a set of pilot

crossborder projects for the improvement of cultural heritage preservation, management and promotion.

The Trust Fund is open to further contributions by other countries participating to the Conference.

The political continuity will be ensured by the institutionalisation of the process started in Mostar in 2004 and prosecuted in Venice in 2005, with a round of yearly conferences to be held on a rotation basis in all the participating countries. After Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Italy, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has already offered to host the conference in 2006.