

**CULTURAL HERITAGE:
A BRIDGE TOWARDS A SHARED FUTURE**
**Second Ministerial Conference on Cultural Heritage
in South-Eastern Europe**
Venice, Italy - 26 November 2005

VENICE DECLARATION

Joint Declaration of the Ministers Responsible for Culture in
South-Eastern Europe and Italy
concerning the Enhancement of Cultural Heritage
for the Stabilisation and the Sustainable Development of the Region

We, the Ministers in charge of cultural affairs of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, and the Minister of cultural heritage and activities of Italy,

Recalling and reaffirming in full the contents of the Mostar Declaration, officially approved by the first Conference of Ministers responsible for culture in South-Eastern Europe and Italy (Mostar – BiH, 19 July 2004),

Confirming our support to the objectives and activities indicated by the Action Plan attached to the Mostar Declaration, as well as our engagement in its implementation,

Recalling the purposes and principles embodied in the Ohrid Declaration (August 2003), in the Tirana Declaration (December 2004), and in the Varna Declaration (May 2005), adopted by the Heads of State of the South-Eastern European countries within the framework of the Regional Forum on the Dialogue Among Civilisations;

Acknowledging the complementary roles and objectives of the International Institutions and Organisations, and in particular the European Union's programmes in the field of culture, as well as the European Commission and the Council of Europe on-going joint action for the integrated rehabilitation of the architectural and archaeological heritage of South-Eastern Europe;

Expressing appreciation for the Italian support to the preservation and enhancement of South-Eastern European cultural heritage, in both bilateral and multilateral programmes, and encouraging its prosecution as well as its possible extension to all the signatory countries of this declaration,

Taking note of the "Strategy for the Preservation and Enhancement of South-Eastern European Cultural Heritage", presented by UNESCO within the framework of this conference, as well as of the cultural heritage assessment reports and recommendations produced in the context of the European Commission and Council of Europe joint

action on the cultural heritage situation in South East Europe and approved by the competent national authorities of the countries concerned,

Adopt the following Declaration:

1. In a period of immense historical, political, social and cultural changes, cultural heritage represents more than ever an invaluable legacy to be duly investigated, preserved and transmitted to future generations. For this reason, public authorities and all members of society have a duty to take all possible measures in order to ensure an improved identification, conservation, protection, management and promotion of cultural heritage.
2. In order to achieve this goal, and in addition to single national policy measures, we commit ourselves to foster international cultural cooperation and cultural diplomacy in South-Eastern Europe, within both bilateral and multilateral cooperation programmes, convinced of the value of cultural heritage as a means of mutual understanding, integration, and human and economic development.
3. By the same token, respect for cultural pluralism must constitute the basis for an enhanced cultural exchange between countries of the region, and within broader international co-operation frameworks. Exchange programmes for students, professionals and public officers must be increased and expanded systematically, with external assistance whenever possible, also in order to promote the adoption of common standards. In particular, we emphasize the need for joint training and capacity building programmes, as well as for sharing of good practices in the various field of cultural heritage management, from preservation activities to the development of cultural tourism.
4. This spirit of reinforced regional collaboration is well represented by the cooperation process initiated with the first conference of ministers responsible for culture in South-Eastern Europe (Mostar, July 2004), as well as by the progress of other existing regional joint projects, which has proven to be a very effective

instrument for preserving and enhancing South-Eastern European cultural heritage. We therefore renew our adhesion to the spirit of Mostar, and express appreciation for the results so far achieved in the implementation of the Mostar Declaration and of the Action Plan appended to it.

5. In particular, considering the role of cultural heritage as a common resource in promoting dialogue and mutual understanding across national borders, we agree that priority must be attached to the development of regional and cross-border projects for cultural cooperation. Accordingly, we recommend to particularly dedicate the UNESCO Trust Fund for Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe to the definition and realisation of cross-border initiatives, and whenever possible to provide the existence of favourable conditions.
6. To this end, we approve the creation of an international working group, to be composed of national experts designated by each of the signatory countries of this Declaration and by UNESCO, with the specific task of assisting the UNESCO Venice Office in the definition and implementation of cross-border projects for the preservation and the enhancement of regional cultural heritage. The working group shall be convened and coordinated by the UNESCO Venice Office. In order to avoid duplication of efforts, we recommend the collaboration of this group with the existing group of national co-ordinators created in the context of the joint action between the European Commission and the Council of Europe.
7. Within this framework of regional cooperation, the role of museums as one of the main links between cultural heritage and the citizens of today and tomorrow must be underlined. Bringing the riches of cultural heritage to the fore, museums are able, protecting and nourishing cultural diversities, to improve mutual understanding inside the region and to extend the very perception of culture. Furthermore, museums play a fundamental role in connecting preservation with promotion and enhancement of cultural heritage, thus contributing to both human and economic development. Adequate resources, hence, shall be allocated within national

programmes to the improvement of museums and galleries, as well as to conservation and restoration activities.

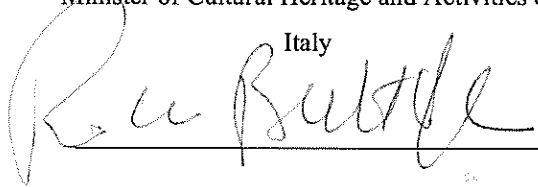
8. Similarly, full support must be ensured to the realisation of international cooperation initiatives aimed at enhancing South-Eastern European museums, according to the conclusions of the “Working Table on International Decentralised Cooperation for the Enhancement of South-Eastern European Museums” annexed to this Declaration.
9. Furthermore, we stress the need for enhancing the process of updating legislation in the field of cultural policy and cultural heritage protection and management. In particular, joint efforts must be stepped up so as to pave the way for a hoped-for harmonization of national legislations on cultural heritage, with the objective of rendering them compatible with European and international standards.
10. Efforts must also be increased towards combating illicit traffic of cultural goods and services, and, more generally, towards a systematic application of international and domestic legislation dealing with the protection and mobility of cultural heritage.
11. A comprehensive and broader access to the many culture-related opportunities generated by the European satellite navigation project “Galileo” is also encouraged, having in mind, in particular, the great potential benefits this project may determine for the development of the so-called “preventive archaeology”. In this regard, we also underline the importance of taking advantage of the co-operation instruments in the cultural field provided by the European Union.
12. Decentralised cooperation is an increasingly important means to achieve development in the world, allowing international solidarity to express itself directly between local communities. The contribution of local government agencies and local civil societies is especially important in the sector of cultural cooperation, given the crucial role these actors may play in promoting pluralism, mutual understanding and cultural exchange. Accordingly, all possible efforts shall be

ensured to the promotion of decentralised cooperation within both national and regional institutions, as well as to the coordination of central and local cooperation initiatives.

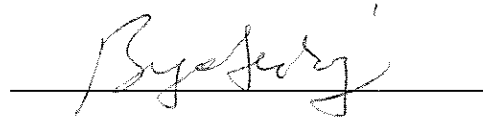
13. Whereas the importance of cultural heritage has been increasingly acknowledged in recent years, the value of creativity and contemporary art as a necessary complement to the preservation of the heritage still needs to come into sharper focus. Promoting creativity in a spirit of freedom and intercultural dialogue is one of the best ways of maintaining cultural vitality. In this regard, we express great appreciation for the decision of the Venice Biennale, in collaboration with UNESCO Venice Office and with the support of the Italian Government, to create an “Art Bridge Prize” dedicated to meritorious young artists from South-Eastern European countries. By the same token, we ensure full support to the successful implementation of the Art Bridge Prize in our respective countries.
14. To the same end, we express appreciation to the Government of Italy for its generous contribution to the Trust Fund for cultural heritage in South-Eastern Europe. Full support shall be ensured to the positive implementation of activities realised under this Trust Fund. We also encourage the enlargement of the Trust Fund to new donors willing to contribute to the preservation and enhancement of South-Eastern European cultural heritage.
15. Given the positive results so far achieved by the cooperation process initiated with the first conference of ministers responsible for culture in South-Eastern Europe, and re-launched with this Venice conference, we encourage and support its continuation in form of yearly ministerial conferences, to be held on a rotation basis in all the countries participating in this declaration.
16. Hence, we express appreciation for the proposal by the President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to hold in Ohrid, on 2006, the next ministerial conference on cultural heritage in South-Eastern Europe, and accept its invitation to participate.

Signatures

H.E. Mr. Rocco Buttiglione
Minister of Cultural Heritage and Activities of

Italy


H.E. Mr. Bujar Leskaj
Minister of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sport of

Albania


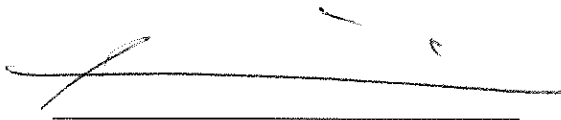
H.E. Mr. Safet Halilović
Minister of Civil Affairs of

Bosnia and Herzegovina

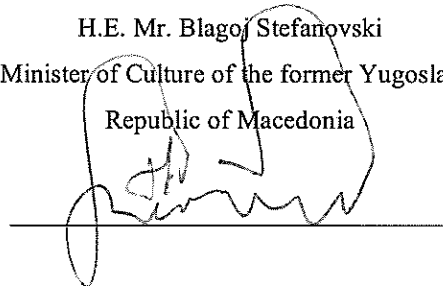

H.E. Mr. Stefan Danailov
Minister of Culture of Bulgaria



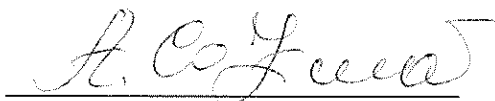
H.E. Mr. Božo Biskupić
Minister of Culture of Croatia



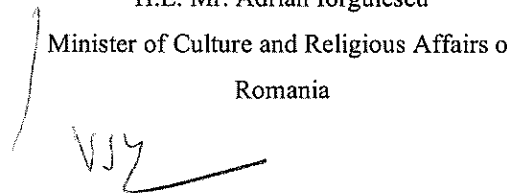
H.E. Mr. Blagoj Stefanovski
Minister of Culture of the former Yugoslav
Republic of Macedonia



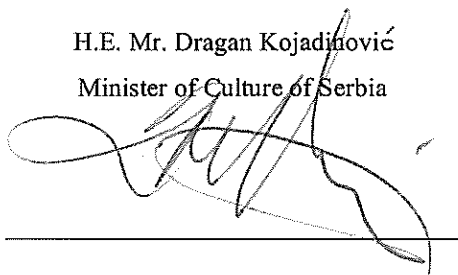
H.E. Mr. Arthur Cozma
Minister of Culture of Moldova



H.E. Mr. Adrian Iorgulescu
Minister of Culture and Religious Affairs of
Romania



H.E. Mr. Dragan Kojadinović
Minister of Culture of Serbia



H.E. Ms. Vesna Kilibarda
Minister of Culture of Montenegro

