



UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Check against delivery

Address by
Mr. Koichiro Matsuura

Director-General
of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the Multimedia Exhibition at the Regional Forum
"Cultural Corridors in South-East Europe"

Varna, Bulgaria, 20 May 2005

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to open this multimedia exhibition, which so effectively demonstrates the splendour of this region's cultural heritage. I would like to also recognize the Archaeological Museum of Varna as a most gracious venue and showcase.

This exhibition, employing modern technology in a marvellous setting dedicated to research into peoples and their heritage, reflects the duality of the task ahead. This conference affords an opportunity to examine the wealth of this region's cultural heritage and to work toward creating ways to recognize and cherish it in the future.

South-East Europe has long been a crossroads of cultures, languages and religions. Cultural corridors are the axes upon which civilizations have traced their routes for centuries. They do not fall neatly within the borders of one country. Cultural corridors show where we have been and where we are headed. The cultural corridors discussed during this forum focus on the rich benefits that result from encounters among different peoples and cultures, from social interaction and from the exchange of ideas, knowledge and savoir-faire. As they evolve, they can continue to be a source of endless growth. Indeed, the coming together fostered by this conference will itself contribute to this continuing development.

This Forum is part of an ongoing effort to secure the recognition and protection of cultural heritage in South-East Europe. We will have the pleasure today of learning about 54 World Heritage sites, 160 worthy sites supervised by the Regional Programme of the Council of Europe and the European Union, monuments selected by the ICOMOS Heritage at Risk programme, and many aspects of intangible cultural heritage. This is an extraordinary share of the world's cultural wealth.

But we are also here to remember that the significance of cultural heritage goes beyond monuments and their surroundings. It includes our traditions, our music, the languages we speak, and the homes we live in. It is an essential part of our identities. As we clarify the concept of cultural corridors, embracing the many aspects of tangible and intangible heritage, we reinforce an essential aspect of ourselves.

This is especially true in this region, which has known such strife and conflict. Our culture contributes to who we are, and can be used as a means to separate peoples or bring them together. This exhibition marks a commitment to contribute to cultural heritage as a means of developing peaceful cooperation and a shared identity.

This is an opportunity to see how each country can reflect on its own unique heritage and identity, and how it contributes to the region overall. By helping us recognize what is unique in our own cultures, this exhibition will also help us to fully appreciate the diversity of the region as a whole.

It is time for the wealth of the ancient civilizations and cultures of this region to be widely known and recognized throughout the world. Together we can safeguard the cultural wonders of this region, including all of the wonders you will see here today.

Thank you.