



**OPATIJA DECLARATION**  
**«COMMUNICATION OF HERITAGE»**  
**1 June 2006**

Heads of State and high officials from South East European countries, the Director-General of UNESCO and the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe gathered in Opatija, Croatia, from 31 May to 2 June 2006 at the Regional Forum of South East European States devoted to the theme “Communication of Heritages”.

Convened by Croatia and UNESCO, the Summit was chaired by the President of the host country, Mr. Stjepan Mesić, together with the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, and the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, Mr. Terry Davis. The Prime Minister of Croatia, Mr. Ivo Sanader welcomed the participants. The following Presidents participated in Opatija: Mr. Georgi Parvanov, Mr. Alfred Moisiu, Mr. Branko Crvenkovski, Mr. Sulejman Tihić, Mr. Filip Vujanović. Turkey was represented by the Minister of State, Mr. Mehmet Aydin; Serbia by the Minister of Culture, Mr. Dragan Kojadinovic; Romania by the State Secretary in the Ministry of Culture, Mr. Virgil Stefan Nitulescu. Greece and Slovenia were represented by Ambassadors Mr. Panayotis Baizos and Mr. Milan Orožen Adamič.

Besides the high officials, experts from South East Europe and international organizations also attended the Opatija Summit.

At the conclusion of the summit, the participants adopted the following **Opatija Declaration:**

We welcome the intensification of the regional dialogue in South East Europe at the highest levels, which has developed since the first Regional Forum in Ohrid (2003), and express our satisfaction that constructive cooperation and solid partnership has developed and is intensifying across a broad range of fields: from political and security issues, economic policy and trade coordination and joint infrastructure development to policies, strategies and programmes in culture, education and the sciences. It has created a new atmosphere of good-neighbourliness, mutual understanding and joint endeavours in different fields in the region.

We appreciate the role played by international organizations in shaping the current levels of stability and security in the region. We seek to strengthen cooperation with our international partners with a view to improving the economic and social situation. The South East European Cooperation Process has earned recognition as a voice of the region and should continue its important activities.

We share the vision of a united Europe as a goal and a destiny for all South East European States. We will spare no efforts in order to make this a reality.

Cultural diversity is a defining factor for Europe. Our readiness to promote intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, as we have committed at the Regional Summit Forum in Tirana (2004), is a firm expression of our willingness to uphold the European standards in that respect.

The earnest commitment to cooperation through dialogue has grown steadily. Heritage has to interact with its time. Based on the principles and objectives of the preceding regional summit meetings in Ohrid (2003), Tirana (2004) and Varna (2005), we agree on the relevance of a set of international and European standard-setting instruments:

- the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Rome, 1950), known as the European Convention on Human Rights (Council of Europe),
- the European Cultural Convention (Council of Europe, Paris, 1954),
- the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954) and its two protocols (1954 and 1999), the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Council of Europe, Granada, 1985),
- the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (UNESCO 1970),
- the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO 1972),
- the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Council of Europe, Valletta, 1992),
- the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 1992),
- the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects (1995),
- the European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe, Florence, 2000),
- the Declaration on Cultural Diversity (Council of Europe, 7 December 2000),
- the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001),
- the Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2001),
- the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2003),
- the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Council of Europe, Faro, 2005),
- the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (UNESCO, 2005).

Imbued by the vision and values of an integrated Europe and the prospect of enhanced cultural cooperation, as charted in Varna (2005) with respect to cultural corridors and cultural routes, we focused in Opatija on the theme of “Communication of Heritage”. Communication is essential for building a Europe without dividing lines. It promotes the exchange of knowledge about heritage in our region and in particular our shared responsibility towards its preservation and safeguarding for future generations, providing a sense of stability, continuity and cultural identity. Our future endeavours in this area shall facilitate integration and shall be guided by the following principles:

- A. Cooperation in South East Europe must build on its rich and diverse tangible and intangible cultural heritage and its history of intense cultural exchange and dialogue. Beyond contacts at the political level, such cooperation should increasingly be citizen-driven.
- B. Well-designed national policies for and effective cooperation in the areas of culture, education, science and tourism are key foundations for further developing South East Europe as a dynamic European region.
- C. Cultural heritage lives in our region and within our people and makes people feel closer to each other. A strategy for “Communication of Heritage” needs to be anchored in national identities and recognize the role of cultural heritage in all its forms as a constituent element of cultural diversity and human creativity. The role of communities and groups who transmit, keep alive and recreate their heritage deserves particular attention.
- D. Heritage conservation and safeguarding are an integral part of sustainable development. This includes the promotion of sustainable cultural and ecological tourism and the development of appropriate cultural industries. Restoration and preservation of heritage should make use of innovative techniques drawing on scientific research and expert institutions. Above all, knowledge and awareness about heritage must be brought to citizens through education, new communications and media tools as well as publications.
- E. Given the importance of cultural heritage for identity and reconciliation in the region, all efforts should be made to return cultural goods to the country of their origin. Likewise, the adherence to and implementation of measures to interdict illicit trafficking in cultural goods should be broadened and reinforced.
- F. Cooperation within the region aimed at promoting a shared vision of the South East European heritage should seek to broaden dialogue and mutual knowledge of other peoples and their cultures, traditions, languages. Furthermore, it should help bring about synergies among existing activities - whether under the auspices of UNESCO, the Council of Europe or the European Union or involving dedicated projects such as those established in the context of the South East Europe Cooperation Process.

- G. Cooperation shall be intensified and extended also to cultural policies within the framework of European integration, as the region's cultural heritage is part of European culture and adds value to the European integration process at large. Resources should be mobilized from governments, the private sector, foundations, NGOs and international organizations for cultural corridors, intercultural dialogue, including inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogue, and for sustaining existing networks. The intention of the Council of Europe to launch pilot projects is most welcome in that regard.
- H. Efforts shall be aimed at increasing the region's share in international exchanges of cultural goods, services and activities.
- I. The capacity of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to foster cultural heritage, exchange, networking and mutual knowledge should be used as a channel for communication, dialogue and mutual engagement across societies. Digitisation opens up new avenues for preservation of cultural heritage and the dissemination of knowledge. Digitised materials, virtual multimedia fora and innovative websites allow broad public access, appealing in particular to the youth. It ensures communication of heritage linking the past with the present and the future.
- J. Cooperation fostering cultural diversity shall also involve the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions. To that end, all countries of the region are invited to ratify the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005).
- K. Countries of South Eastern Europe are equally invited to sign and ratify the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, which provides a basis for the sustainable use of the cultural and natural resources of the territory.

Taking into account these principles, we welcome the finalized Varna Strategy for identifying, preserving, sustainably using and promoting cultural corridors in South East Europe and invite the Governments of the region, and in particular the Ministers of Culture or other competent authorities, to adopt the Strategy and to agree upon a related Action Plan. The preparation of the Action Plan should also benefit from input by experts from the countries of the region and by regional and international organizations.

We thank President Traian Basescu for his invitation to hold the next Regional Forum in Romania and accordingly we agree to meet in Sibiu, the European Capital of Culture 2007, in the first half of 2007.

In 2008, we will convene the Regional Forum in Greece and in 2009 in Montenegro.

All participants expressed their profound appreciation to President Mesić and to the Government and people of the Republic of Croatia for their excellent arrangements made and for their generous hospitality.