



**CULTURAL CORRIDORS OF SOUTH EAST EUROPE  
COMMON PAST AND SHARED HERITAGE -  
A KEY TO FUTURE PARTNERSHIP  
A REGIONAL FORUM**

Varna, May 20-21 2005

**OPENING ADDRESS BY H.E. GEORGI PARVANOV,  
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA**

Colleagues,  
Director General of UNESCO,  
Secretary General of the Council of Europe,  
Ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like first to say “Welcome in Varna”, the seaside capital of the Republic of Bulgaria and to thank you for accepting my invitation to take part in the forum “The Cultural corridors of South East Europe –common past and shared heritage, a key to a future partnership”.

Why do we discuss this subject today?

At this moment, we, the Heads of State join a debate, which has been lasting in scientific and expert circles for decades. One can argue on various subjects, but there is a certain thing – the idea of “cultural corridors” is imposed, resulting from our efforts to define our spiritual relations and interaction, and even the proximity of the civilization of this entire region, which we represent today.

The Cultural Corridors have lasted throughout different periods and ages. They have been economically determined, which reasons the relative coincidence with the present pan European transport corridors. They are incredibly dynamic, as a result of deep inner processes and the tangible external influence on culture and politics.

I would suggest that today and tomorrow, we base on the already accepted definitions. I would suggest skipping now the theoretical arguments of the Balkan studies during the last decades – whether the “corridors” are “roads” or “routes”, let scientists argue on that. I, as a person, who has attitude to science, would wish them that this argument would be as much free of the scholastic as possible. As far as I know the genesis of the

concept of the “cultural corridor”, I have to confess, that there have been attempts this concept to be monopolized and even exploited for self-interests at certain moments. I believe that today, at this high-level Forum, we will succeed in erasing the ideological and nationalist connotations of this concept.

Today, in fact we have to confess, that our region, history, culture, and this entire diverse cultural and historical heritage have been often used for discrimination and sometimes even for confrontation. The things from our history textbooks that stay in mind are not the maps, that we see here, but those, showing the military operations. It is certain, that we have to keep the memory of our history and of the hero-army leaders alive, but losing the balance is one of the reasons, for which the image of South East Europe is burdened with too many negative ideas and is a symbol of ethnical tension and religious conflicts until today.

And today, ladies and gentlemen, the question whether, by common efforts, we can present a different image, in fact the authentic image of South East Europe, still stays. This forum is a sign that the region can think and can speak on its own, that it can defend its own vision of the cultural cooperation within the region and of the region with our European and international partners. It's not rare, when specialists define the Balkans as a contact zone, a place, where the East and the West, the North and the South, the Christianity and the Islam meet. Here, in the region, ideas, visions, beliefs and cultural corridors are intertwined. All this creates a unique model, which has got its place in the European civilization, but also bears its regional specifics and peculiarities.

East Europe is not the other Europe. That is not the European suburb, neither from historic, nor from contemporary process' point. I believe that today's debate will show, that the enlargement of the European Union has its deep historic and geopolitical motivation; that in the final analysis the region as a whole, each of the countries, represented here, deserve a confirmation and a realization of their European perspective.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

That is not the first time, when we, the Heads of State from the region, come together and here, in this active, multilateral dialogue, a basic factor for the new climate, and for the regional stabilization trend, we have our meetings and discussions. A brand new thing for the organization of today's forum is that we do not envisage a discussion on the whole bunch of regional problems, but we are focusing on a certain and, I believe you will agree, extremely significant issue: the issue of cultural exchange.

This Forum has its background. The first impulse, the initiative came exactly from the experts on the cultural and historic heritage. The basic work-out is also theirs. They have had the most significant contribution for the preparation of the whole packet of projects, which now illustrate this hall and which today are presented to the attention of the Heads of States. Such kind of political and expert meeting is a new phenomenon. It is an evidence for the willingness of the presidents and of the governments to promote the expert principle in their work.

I would like to put a stress on the broad and effective partnership, which we had, while preparing this forum, not only because it was organized under the auspices of the Head of State of the host-country, the Director General of UNESCO, and of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. These two organizations, together with the European Commission and the ICOMOS, have, through their experts, most actively participated in the

preparation of the Declaration and I hope that during the forum, they will help in a political and expert way for the achievement of the desired particular result.

I would like to express my gratitude to the leaders and the representatives of these organizations about the key role they had during the preparation and the conduct of the present forum. I would also note especially UNESCO's contribution, which, together with the Bulgarian government undertook the finance of our meeting here, at the Golden Sands resort, and also of the multimedia exhibition that we will launch tomorrow, at the Museum of Archaeology in Varna.

I would like to underline yet another difference between this and the other similar forums, we have had before. I believe that our work on the subject will not finish with the probable adoption of the Varna Declaration. As it is stated in the draft decisions, we have the ambition to create a Regional Expert Network, which will have the particular task to work out and adopt a Strategy and a Plan of Action for identifying, preserving, sustainably using and promoting cultural corridors of South East Europe.

Thus, passing from the experts to the politicians and from us, politicians to the experts again, the subject of our forum will gain its specific parameters and results. In this regard, I hope that one of the colleagues Heads of State will host our next meeting in 2006 – a meeting, where the above-mentioned Strategy and Action Plan should be adopted.

Bearing in mind that the cultural corridors of South East Europe continue in neighbour-to-the-region countries, we have invited the Ministers of culture of these countries and the country, chairing the European Union, to participate as observers to the forum.

I would like to thank to all, who have accepted our invitation and are with us today. I hope that in future, we will find the most appropriate way to develop our project in the rest of Europe as well. Even more, I believe, that if successful our idea for the cultural corridors may be applied in other trouble regions in the world, such as the Caucasus.

I can not miss to note and express my gratitude to all Bulgarian institutions and especially to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, of Culture and Tourism, of Finance for the excellent cooperation and the concrete contribution to the preparation and the conduct of this forum.

I believe that all participants in the forum will join my gratitude to the mayor and the municipality of the city of Varna for the hospitality and the opportunity, we have, to organize our meeting in this extremely beautiful city, with thousand year old history. Mr. Mayor, please, give our apologies to the Varna citizens for some temporary restrictions, that usually go with the organization of such European forums.

Of course, together with serious work, we will not miss the chance to get you acquainted with the possibilities for having a rest in this beautiful part of the Bulgarian Black Sea.

Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I announce the Forum in Varna opened and I wish to all participants successful and fruitful work and a good stay at the Black Seaside.