



Address

By
The Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Terry Davis

"European heritage without borders"

Forum on Cultural Corridors in South East Europe

Varna, 20 May 2005



Mr. President,

Director-General,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Home to the cradle of European civilisation, South East Europe is not only at the origin of such essential elements of common European culture as democracy and the scientific approach to the exploration of the world. Rich with its fertile mix of ethnicities and religions, this region has also created some of the finest pieces of architecture, art and literature.

Today, we pay tribute to this invaluable heritage, but above all we are here to support the initiative for Cultural Corridors in South East Europe - an initiative which illustrates the way in which the region is emerging as a laboratory for intercultural dialogue and reconciliation. This initiative recognises that unity and peace can only be rooted in lasting trust between nations and communities, and it points to the enjoyment of diverse cultural heritage as a source of mutual trust.

The Heads of State and Government of the 46 Council of Europe member states, who met only a few days ago in Warsaw, underlined once again the role of culture and heritage as building blocks of European unity, and at the same time they identified cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue as major fields of action for the Council of Europe in the coming years.

I trust that the Forum which brings us together today will endorse intercultural dialogue, based on the recognition of common cultural roots, as a political priority for South East Europe and thus provide several Council of Europe member states with an opportunity to give a concrete impetus to the Warsaw Summit's decisions. I am grateful to you, Mr President, for the opportunity to participate in this Forum together with one of our key partners, UNESCO, with whom we share similar objectives and concerns, and for the opportunity to welcome all participants in this Forum which will create a positive political dynamic for the region and for Europe as a whole.

The Council of Europe is proud of its contribution to the development of European cultural identity and the enjoyment of common European heritage. 56 years ago, the founders of this now pan-European organisation recognised that the key to European unity lies in the common values of democracy, human rights, the rule of

law and respect for difference. Exactly half a century ago, the pioneers of European unity adopted the European Cultural Convention, an instrument designed to encourage cooperation on cultural matters and create conditions for reconciliation, understanding and dialogue between Europe's peoples.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, this European Cultural Convention has been the framework in which the countries of Central and Eastern Europe first joined the European family, establishing a dialogue on values and learning to know each other, before taking up other political and legal commitments. Today, the Convention is a basis for policy innovation in areas such as access to culture and heritage, and the management of cultural industries, for the benefit of social cohesion and sustainable development, and the countries of South East Europe have a special role in this joint endeavour.

All Europeans are grateful to the countries in South East Europe for the importance they give to cultural heritage. Your innovative and dynamic approach to cultural heritage

as a set of resources inherited from the past, serving to promote a sense of regional identity and pride, paves the way for sustainable economic and social development. South East Europe is willing to give a clear priority to the human dimension of development; it is looking at cultural tourism as a means of enhancing the quality of life of all citizens and promoting social cohesion and cultural citizenship. This approach is fully in line with the Draft Framework Convention on the value of heritage for society which is now under discussion by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

As part of our contribution to this process, the Council of Europe provides assistance with institutional capacity-building in the field of heritage management, and encourages the use of heritage as a means for confidence building within and between countries. We do so by helping to improve management systems and skills in public administration, by harmonising legislations and by supporting the development of policies and strategies for the preservation of heritage and, equally important, for access to heritage. We are proud of having been able, through our "Regional Programme for Cultural and Natural Heritage", to contribute to your efforts to adopt a new perspective on diversity of heritage as a source of social progress and human development.

In addition, our Recommendation on cultural routes, and the Cultural Routes Institute in Luxembourg are unique instruments to provide conceptual and practical support to the Cultural Corridors.

Similarly, our assistance programme for the rehabilitation of the archaeological and architectural heritage of South East Europe, implemented jointly with the European

Commission, seeks to ensure that the participating countries and institutions remain the main actors of their heritage policies.

I see this project, carried out through inclusive democratic processes, as an expression of the right of individuals and communities to enjoy their heritage and a reminder of their duty to respect the heritage of others.

Cultural tourism has long been an important field of action for the Council of Europe not only because it is a factor in sustainable development but also because mobility and the knowledge of history are indispensable motors for our project of European unity.

The initiative being launched here in Varna subscribes to the philosophy and integrated approach of the Council of Europe to cultural heritage and tourism. It will give vitality and durability to the progress already achieved by South East European countries in drawing up a common image, in understanding and in coming to terms with the rich diversity of this region through a variety of representations of its soul and its history.

This Forum not only reaffirms the common principles and values upheld through earlier projects, but also provides an important political framework for future projects, aimed at fostering sustainable cultural and economic development through heritage-based tourism. The Council of Europe strongly supports the implementation of such projects with a European dimension combining economic dynamism, a democratic approach, care for sustainable social and community development and multiculturalism as a source of vitality and creativity.

I wish this Forum every success and look forward to the results of our discussions.