

Mostar Declaration

Joint declaration of the Ministers responsible for culture in South-East Europe and Italy concerning the enhancement of cultural heritage for the stabilisation and the sustainable development of the region

Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina), 19 July 2004

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

Recalling the international conventions, declarations and recommendations dealing with the protection of cultural and natural heritage, including the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict adopted at The Hague and the two Protocols thereto, the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, the 1972 Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, the 1989 Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore, the 1985 Convention for the Protection of Architectural Heritage of Europe, the 1992 (revised) European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage, the 2001 Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage, the 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the 2003 Declaration concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage,

Reaffirming the purposes and principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

Mindful of the relevant Resolutions adopted by the United Nations, UNESCO and the Council of Europe concerning the protection of cultural heritage and cultural diversity,

Recalling the *Message from Ohrid* adopted by the participants of the Regional Forum on the Dialogue among Civilizations (August 2003), in which the Heads of State of South-East European countries stated “The challenge [...] lies in associating cultural heritage with development policies and demonstrating how much this powerful symbol of a people’s identity can become a unifying factor for national and regional reconciliation. This may well serve as a foundation for a shared future.”,

Expressing our commitment to enhancing co-operation on cultural affairs within the major regional organisations and cooperation initiatives, with specific attention to the Ionian Adriatic Initiative (IAI), the Central European Initiative (CEI) and the South East Europe Cooperation Process (SEEC),

Acknowledging that regional co-operation based on mutual trust promotes political stability and economic development, and that cultural co-operation provides both added dynamism and sustainability to that process,

Emphasizing that the respect for cultural heritage and cultural diversity is a non-negotiable principle that is essential for dialogue and human advancement,

Recognizing that tolerance and respect for cultural pluralism are indispensable in the era of globalisation,

Expressing our conviction about the role of culture in optimising the integration processes and our determination to enhance bilateral and multilateral co-operation in the field of culture among countries of the region and with others, and to support international co-operation initiatives in this field from the private sector and the civil society,

Considering that the opening of the Old Bridge of Mostar is a powerful and exemplary signal that symbolizes the ending of ethnic prejudice and highlights the normalisation of inter-community relations,

Adopt the following Declaration:

1. Cultural heritage in South-East Europe represents an invaluable legacy accumulated over several millennia in an area that is often referred to as the cradle of European culture and civilization. The extraordinary diversity and richness of South-East European cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, reflecting successive periods and styles of artistic creation, requires protection from destruction and neglect as a matter of urgency.
2. Governments, local authorities and all members of society have a duty to refrain from deliberate destruction of cultural heritage and to take appropriate measures for its protection and conservation, thus ensuring that it is handed on intact to future generations.
3. Protection of cultural heritage and the defence of the diversity of cultures are ethical imperatives inseparable from respect for human dignity. They deserve unconditional support especially from public authorities as well as from civil society.
4. Concerted efforts are to be made for the perception of South-East Europe as a region of tolerance, reconciliation and cultural inter-community dialogue. The positive developments in the region must be underscored by concrete and visible activities targeting the general public and aimed at increasing the knowledge and mutual respect of the regional cultural heritage and its promotion in Europe and all over the world.
5. The process of updating legislation in the field of cultural policy and cultural and natural heritage protection and management will be enhanced. Thus legal frameworks will be provided that are compatible with common European standards and international standards, but also with the goal of economic development.
6. As the most important international conventions dealing with cultural heritage protection have been largely ratified in all countries of South-East Europe, efforts must

be stepped up to ensure effective application and implementation of these instruments, as well as to define effective tools for their periodical actualisation and flexible application.

7. Creating conditions conducive to harmonious development of spiritual and material well-being requires increased attention to the manifold elements that make up the complex cultural heritage in South-East Europe, such as cultural monuments and sites, historic cities, natural sacred sites, cultural landscapes, the underwater heritage, movable cultural heritage, museums, traditional arts and crafts, archives and documentary heritage, cinematographic heritage, oral traditions, languages, festive events, rites, music, the performing arts, literature and culinary traditions. Safeguarding that heritage requires the provision of adequate human and financial resources.
8. Whereas the cultural component of development has been increasingly acknowledged in recent years, the role of cultural heritage as a factor of economic growth needs to come into sharper focus. Accordingly, sustainable and up-to-date cultural heritage management strategies, both at national and regional level, have to be defined and activated, thus ensuring the integration of conservation attitudes into contemporary economic and social goals including tourism.
9. By the same token, culture and cultural pluralism must be recognised as potentially powerful agents of active cooperation, mutual understanding, collaboration and social cohesion. In the democratic societies of South-East Europe, respect for cultural pluralism must therefore constitute the basis for an enhanced cultural exchange both within a country and in international co-operation programmes. Exchange programmes need to be increased and expanded systematically, with external assistance whenever possible.
10. Given the importance of cultural heritage in promoting mutual understanding and socio-economic development, the cultural heritage component should be duly highlighted within bilateral, multilateral and community programmes launched for the stabilisation and development of South-East Europe. To that end, cooperation with international organizations such as UNESCO will be strengthened.
11. In order to monitor the implementation of the present Declaration and the Action Plan appended to it, an appropriate mechanism of assessment shall be defined. This mechanism will include the functions of promoting and co-ordinating regional co-operation programmes for the enhancement of cultural heritage, in line with the principles and actions mentioned herein.