



Президент на Република България  
Прессекретариат

---

**Statement by President Georgi Parvanov  
at the UNESCO General Conference  
on the Tenth Anniversary of the Adoption of UNESCO Universal  
Declaration on Cultural Diversity  
November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011, Paris**

***Madam Chair,  
Madam Director General Of UNESCO,  
Mr. President of Indonesia,  
Ministers,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies And Gentlemen,***

It is a great honour for me to be present here to collectively celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity.

Today we clearly see that its adoption provided a strong impetus for the efforts to achieve humanity's age-long dream of a world without war, without poverty, free from the fear of tomorrow. In fact, it is a platform whose vision is to create conditions for the elaboration of international and national instruments aimed at ensuring peaceful coexistence of different cultures, traditions and historic heritage. For the first time in history, commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms is seen as a guarantee of cultural diversity.

Today, as we celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, it is important to point out that this Declaration is not something unchanging, given once and for all. Against the background of the ongoing dynamic discussion and deepening globalization, in less than two years UNESCO prepared the ***Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions***, adopted in October 2005, which Bulgaria joined in 2007. The objective of this new Convention is to give recognition to the distinctive nature of cultural activities as vehicles of identity and values, different from other goods and services. Under the provisions of the Convention, the Parties assume responsibility to maintain, adopt and implement policies and measures to safeguard and promote the diversity of cultural expressions, to develop and promote the free exchange and circulation of ideas and artistic achievements.



**Президент на Република България  
Прессекретариат**

---

Thank you for the invitation. I am happy to be here and I view my presence here as a recognition of Bulgaria's role as a factor of peace and stability on the Balkans and in Europe as a whole, as a recognition of our concrete policies and actions in compliance with the principles of equal dignity of and respect for the cultures of our neighbors, in the spirit of building bridges among peoples and countries until quite recently divided by conflicts and confrontations.

Small Bulgaria, ladies and gentleman, is part of South East Europe. Until quite recently, the Balkans were known as the "Powder Keg of Europe". Unfortunately, it was in this part of the world where quite a few European and international conflicts broke out. For way too long, for decades and centuries, we were a symbol of conflict, of controversy, of military showdown. However, if we look back into a more distant past, we will see that South East Europe was the region where the foundations of the European civilization were laid. A visit to Bulgaria or any other South East European country will reveal numerous and diverse civilization layers from the times of mysterious ancient Thracians, Romans, Byzantines and Ottoman Turks up to the modern layers of the European civilization. These layers have sometimes been preserved in the same sites, one on top of the other, and have survived despite the conflicts of modern times and the borders of nation-states. They have survived also thanks to the relations of ethnic and religious tolerance cherished over the centuries. Today, as has always or at least almost always been the case in the past, Bulgarians, Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Jews and Roma live side by side and help each other. It is not unusual in the same village to see Muslims help build an Orthodox Christian church and Christians give a hand in the construction of a mosque. In my view, these are small but highly significant manifestations of this tradition of tolerance, cultural coexistence, handed down to us by our ancestors. It is our duty to preserve this tradition into the future and fill it with new meaning.

As a historian, I am very well familiar with the development of these processes over time. And it's exactly because of this, ladies and gentlemen, that I would like to share my deep concern over the fact that the model of ethnic and religious tolerance is not something unchanging, given once and for all. Yes, Bulgaria is now an EU member state, partly due to the recognition of this model of tolerance; however even in the tolerant Bulgaria we are not immune to challenges and provocations threatening ethnic and religious peace. The current



**Президент на Република България  
Прессекретариат**

---

situation of economic and financial crisis is even more risky since, unfortunately, there are always political leaders who try to take advantage of the difficult social situation and create tension. It is very easy to point a finger at your neighbor, at someone who is different from you, and accuse them of being the reason for the dire straits of any other community. And the role of the leaders, both national and international ones, is to do their best not to allow such things to happen.

Today we witness certain processes in some regions of the world and especially in urban areas that cause growing concern, i.e. processes of impeded communication and coexistence among different cultures, peoples and religions. However, it is not cultural differences that are usually at the core of such crises but rather underestimation or marginalization of minority cultures. That's why our today's forum is so important, that's why it is crucial to continue long-term dialogue launched over 10 years ago.

This really explains why we initiated here on the Balkans this annual forum that we refer to as "cultural corridors" in SEE, corridors of cultural interaction. State leaders, presidents and heads of state representing countries that in the past waged wars caused by cultural differences and historic arguments, have for many years now been getting together and not only reaching agreement on issues of history, culture, and cultural diversity but also trying to persuade Europe that this is the right way to go, that this is our contribution to the important discussion of cultural diversity unfolding today with a new force and with new arguments.

This year the *Cultural Corridors in South East Europe* Project has entered a new phase. Speaking at the opening of the 9th Regional Summit of Heads of State of South East Europe in Belgrade, the Director-General of UNESCO launched a new initiative "Culture: a Bridge to Development". The initiative has received strong support from all participating states. Its objective is to unite the creative artistic forces of the region as distinct drivers of sustainable social and economic development and I am confident that we will join our efforts to contribute to its successful implementation.

Today, ladies and gentlemen, we witness certain processes in some regions of the world and especially in urban areas that cause growing concern, i.e. processes of impeded communication and coexistence



**Президент на Република България  
Прессекретариат**

---

among different cultures, peoples and religions. However, just as the speakers before me, I argue that it is not cultural differences that are usually at the core of such crises but rather underestimation or marginalization of minority cultures. These developments, however, should not be perceived as a failure of the attempts to build multicultural societies. These phenomena can be attributed to wrong government and corporate policies, unsolved social problems, bad education as well as mental and spiritual gridlock degenerating into radical mottos and absurd political projects.

Here I hasten to point out that the world does not need any new political short-sightedness but a meaningful discussion to focus on achievements and boost economic development taking advantage of the capacities of creative industries. We should not underestimate culture as a factor of development and peace and, in my opinion, that's what our session today is really about. We are called upon to respond to those public groups and political messages that neglect the potential of coexistence of different cultures. Protection of cultural diversity is a major instrument to help us achieve balance in complicated relations among peoples and cultures because I am confident that when other approaches fail, culture can heal, culture can support public attitudes and political processes.

In conclusion I would like to stress that my actions all along as a leader have always been and will always be based on tolerance, consideration of others and trust in the power of this approach. This is the only way we could make the world of the future a fairer, more peaceful and more humane place; but to make this happen, each one of us needs somebody else by their side. This is the only way for the prophetic words ascribed to Orpheus, a mythical singer, poet and musician, who lived in ancient Bulgarian land, to come true: "The world may be conquered with a lyre, not with a sword".

Thank you for your kind attention!