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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Address by Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

**on the occasion of the first Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Culture
of South East Europe “Enhancing Culture for Sustainable Development”**

Ohrid, 28 June 2014

Excellency Ms Elizabetha Kancheska-Milevska, Minister of Culture,

Excellencies Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and an honour to be here.

Before I start, allow me to extend sincere condolences for the human and material losses following the catastrophic floods that have affected Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and also Bulgaria last month.

You may be sure UNESCO stands by your side and is ready to assist you within its field of competences, to mitigate risks and prevent future floods.

Such natural disasters remind us of the vulnerabilities all societies share and the need for deeper regional cooperation.

Exactly 21 years ago, on 28 June 1993, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia joined UNESCO as a full-fledged Member State. I should like on this occasion to pay tribute today to the country's active role in support of important initiatives aimed at promoting regional cooperation processes, especially in the field of culture.

Furthermore, exactly 10 years ago, in 2004, the governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Italy convened the first *Ministerial Conference on Cultural Heritage in South-East Europe*, in the margins of celebrations for the opening of the reconstructed Old Bridge of Mostar.

This was the first meeting of ministers of culture to take place in the region after the conflicts that had taken such a heavy toll across the region.

Since then, ministerial conferences on cultural heritage in South-East Europe have been organized annually with the support of UNESCO.

In 2005, countries in the region agreed to establish a *Council of Ministers of Culture of South-East Europe*, as an additional cooperation mechanism.

Over the last decade, these two platforms have improved considerably legal and institutional frameworks, brought together professionals and institutions, and enhanced ratification and implementation of UNESCO Conventions.

The results are there for all to see.

Together, we have built a regional network of experts and launched five regional centres of excellence, to spearhead capacity-building and heritage advocacy throughout the region.

I see one of the most striking examples of this cultural cooperation in the joint nomination of Stecci for inscription on the World Heritage List, prepared by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia.

This initiative has also facilitated the mobilization of financial resources.

Since 2004, over 15 million USD have channelled through and managed by UNESCO – specifically aimed to enhance the role of culture in South-East Europe.

So, today, ten years on, I believe we can take pride in what we have achieved.

This is a time to renew our commitment and to open a new chapter in our work, with an integrated and unified platform for ministerial cooperation.

I welcome this new platform all the more strongly, given its emphasis on the nexus between culture and sustainable development.

I see this as a major step forward, and one that resonates strongly with the mandate and action of UNESCO.

I see this also as an opportunity for UNESCO to deepen direct cooperation with participating countries and to reinforce its partnership with the European Union, the Council of Europe and others.

I believe we share the conviction sustainability is not a technical issue.

Sustainable development cannot be crafted solely through economic and political strategies – it must be built upon sustainable and inclusive societies.

Culture stands at the heart of this vision, as a force for dialogue, social cohesion, creativity, dignity and participation.

Culture brings sustainability of development -- by making it meaningful to people, by deepening ownership and participation, by making sure it is *of* the people, *for* the people, and *by* the people.

This is the vision we are bringing to the process of shaping the post-2015 sustainable development agenda -- I believe the countries of South East Europe can play a decisive role here, to help political leaders understand the power of culture, both as an industry that provides jobs and drives economic growth, as well as an enabler of sustainability, fostering dialogue and identity.

On 5 May, at the United Nations General Assembly in New York, many of you made this case loud and clear, during the Special Thematic Debate on *Culture and Sustainable Development in the Post-2015 Development Agenda*.

Eighteen Ministers, including Excellency Ms Mirela Kumbaro, Minister of Culture of Albania and Excellency Mr Ivan Tasovac, Minister of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia, and high-level representatives of Member States, along with the G-77 and China, and the European Union -- all concurred on the need to integrate culture deeply into the post 2015 agenda.

By 'culture,' I do not mean only heritage, but also creative industries, cultural diversity, and the arts – and I am pleased this broad vision of culture, promoted by UNESCO for decades now, is fully reflected in the regional strategy you approved yesterday.

Around this table, I believe we are all convinced of the power of culture as a driver and enabler for sustainable development.

We need now to convince others -- other leaders and other ministers, of finance, of the economy, including sometimes in your own Governments, of the need to invest on culture.

2014 is a pivotal year, as we shape the post-2015 international development agenda.

To succeed, we need to show concretely “how” culture can be integrated in development strategies, with specific targets and indicators – for poverty eradication, for education, for the environment, for sustainable cities, for inclusion and reconciliation.

South-East Europe is taking centre stage in this process.

Two countries in the region – Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina – will host national dialogues on culture for development, following the UN General Assembly Resolution on Culture and Development adopted last December, to allow stakeholders to make recommendations to integrate culture in the post-2015 development agenda.

I am convinced this renewed Council will play a key role in coordinating and facilitating such processes.

This region is vibrant – it has strong lessons to share and it has tremendous potential to develop, to become a beacon of cultural development.

This calls for will and commitment.

It calls on all of us to join forces to make the most of this region's fabulous cultural wealth and creativity.

Thank you again for your engagement.

I wish you fruitful deliberations.