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Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

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 9th UNESCO Regional Summit of
Heads of State of South East Europe**

Belgrade, 2 September 2011

Your Excellencies, Heads of State of South East Europe,
Distinguished Ministers, Ambassadors,
Distinguished Representative of the Secretary-General of the
Council of Europe,
Distinguished Commissioner Vassiliou of the European
Commission,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

I am delighted that UNESCO has the privilege of co-organizing
this 9th Regional Summit of Heads of State of South-East
Europe, held at the gracious invitation of President Boris Tadić.

Thank you very much, Mr. President. You Personally have done a
lot to promote and sustain this important dialogue in the region
and you have imparted a new and creative dimension to our
deliberations today.

It is a real pleasure to be here.

I wish to thank the Heads of State of all countries of the region. Your presence is vital for the success of our debates and our common action.

I am very pleased also to see representatives from our longstanding partners, from the Council of Europe and Commissioner Vassiliou from the European Commission.

Indeed, these annual meetings show the determination of political leaders in the region to position culture, the arts and heritage, at the heart of peace-building, reconciliation and development.

We can see the results of these efforts.

The people of South East Europe have demonstrated how cultural dialogue can help people overcome differences and reconcile after conflicts.

They have shown also that dialogue is essential for progress together towards sustainable development and political stability.

This vision of culture as a bridge for reconciliation and development is ever more important today -- as regions around the world, notably North Africa, undergo rapid change and look for new democratic pathways, new models for peace and recovery.

I believe the people of South East Europe have unique experience to share.

Over the years, these Summits have developed unique expertise on promoting and protecting cultural diversity and advancing the notion of common heritage.

I am convinced this is one of the greatest challenges of our time. This is why I am so pleased that countries of this region, a region that is also mine, have taken the lead on this issue.

The beautiful surroundings for our meeting –Viminacium– embody this vision.

Viminacium is one of those places where the encounter of cultures between East and West has always been vibrant.

This city, one of the most important of the Roman Empire, was of exceptional importance at the northern border of the Empire. It has always been a place for exchange, for communication and for trade. I can hardly think of a better place to share our vision today.

I have come today, Ladies and Gentlemen, with a proposal to take this vision further.

The theme of this year's Summit, 'Contemporary art and reconciliation,' touches me profoundly, for many reasons.

First, as you yourself - President Tadić - mentioned, at a time of financial crisis in Europe, as decision-makers seek for innovative solutions, contemporary art is an inspiration for creative thinking.

UNESCO has long supported contemporary artists from across the region – most notably, for instance, in the framework of the prestigious Venice Biennale international art exhibition.

Second, I believe the daily work of artists is intimately linked with the purpose of intercultural dialogue and reconciliation.

Contemporary artists do not work alone.

They are inspired by their rich heritage, and also by their peers, by other cultures, regardless of borders.

They need the inspiration from, and recognition of, others, from neighboring countries. They need to participate in exhibitions together. They need to exchange views, to build networks and create joint ventures.

Such exchanges and networks are very concrete ways by which we can reinforce regional integration and peace through the transformative power of art and creativity.

Peace is not only something to be maintained, it is something people must produce, or even better: recreate - every day.

This was also the headline message from the discussions of the High Panel for Peace and Reconciliation that I established last year under the auspices of UNESCO.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is UNESCO's longstanding mission, Ladies and Gentlemen, to build bridges between artists and with decision-makers, to enhance cultural cooperation.

This underpins our organization of these annual Summits of Heads of States and the Ministerial Conferences on Cultural Heritage. The promotion of intercultural dialogue is the red thread common to all these events. UNESCO has excelled in such dialogue activities for the better part of its 65 years of existence and in the process we are engaged with trusted partners, like the Council of Europe, and a wide range of stakeholders, including the Alliance of Civilizations with whom I have concluded a forward-looking and proactive memorandum of understanding.

We have created together regional centres of excellence that provide strong platforms for cooperation, now and in the future -- in Zadar for Underwater Heritage, in Sofia for Intangible heritage, in Skopje for Digitalization, in Tirana for the Conservation and Restoration of Heritage.

I am pleased the government of Montenegro is considering establishing a fifth such regional centre in Cetinje on the management of cultural heritage.

Thanks to projects such as those of the Millennium Development Goal Achievement Fund in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, The former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia and Turkey, important results have been achieved for the enhancement of culture as a powerful lever to reach the millennium development goals.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, we have seen the revitalization of the old medieval fortress and old house of 'Eminagica family' in Tesanj.

Visits have been organized to increase cultural tourism. These have enabled local schools to showcase their cooking, traditional designs and crafts.

We have also brought our expertise to bear in the reconstruction of historic monasteries in Kosovo, as you rightfully mentioned, Mr President, with all communities concerned.

We must absolutely build on these results. We must make the most of the expertise we have gained.

You may remember the words of the Canadian poet, Christopher Levenson who wrote in 2000 about the destruction of the Old Bridge in Mostar during the war in Bosnia Herzegovina:

Now when so much is gone

that made us human all the world over, where

do we find the heart to begin again?

The people of the region of South East Europe have found the heart to begin again – through a determination to overcome common problems, through the embrace of democratic values and European aspirations.

Now is the time to prove our capacity to go a step further.

I firmly believe we can.

We can draw on these national initiatives, in order to encourage truly transnational and cross borders projects.

We can move beyond national pride to build a fully integrated cultural space across the region.

In this respect, I wish to commend the cooperation of all of us and to cite a few examples: between Bosnia, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia for the inclusion of the medieval tombs Stecaks in their respective tentative lists as a future transnational serial nomination for inscription on the World Heritage List.

I commend Slovenia also for the inclusion of the Dinaric Karst on their tentative lists.

UNESCO will spare no effort in supporting such joint projects.

We must also reach far beyond institutional and political conferences, to build genuine bridges within the civil society, among artists, intellectuals, teachers, professors and creators.

Let us join forces to help them work within stronger and more integrated networks.

This is why we must support regional think tanks, create innovative networks and platforms that span the region – through cross-borders festivals, exchanges of artefacts between museums of different countries, creating travelling exhibitions.

We must do far more to imbue young people with the values of a shared cultural environment.

This is why I have come this morning to launch a new global initiative, 'Culture: a Bridge to Development.'

This initiative will seek to create such networks and to build such cultural bridges among professionals, civil society and politicians.

If we do so, it will be easier for them to participate in urban, economic and social development projects.

Modern art, networks of young artists, media, cultural industries, cultural tourism, are powerful accelerators for growth.

They create jobs. They are sources of revenue.

But we will only be successful if we create global events, if we make use of highly visible venues, able to attract investors and to catalyze energy from across the region.

We must focus on youth. We need to engage them in cross border festivals, in cultural exchanges, as well as in arts education programs -- in line with the visionary recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist adopted by UNESCO here, in Belgrade, already 30 years ago, as President Tadić just mentioned.

The basic principles of this new initiative were endorsed at the Belgrade Conference last June by the Ministers of Culture of South Eastern Europe.

If we succeed, this pilot initiative could be extended to other regions, especially those facing post-conflict situations.

This is why I wish to make an appeal today to all artists, intellectuals and media professionals, museums curators and teachers, cultural institutions, civil society institutions, to join this effort.

Governments must engage to observe and promote peace -- but only people can reconcile.

Let me assure you that UNESCO - and myself - will spare no effort in supporting such reconciliation.

Thank you very much.