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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
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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 3rd sub-regional “Balkan Bridges Speak” event

Berat, Albania, 29 March 2014

Honourable Mr Fadil Nasufi, Mayor of Berat,

Minister of Culture of Albania Mirela Kumbaro,

Mr Nikolay Stojanov, President of the *Balkanika Foundation*,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to join you here in the World Heritage City of Berat, on the occasion of *Balkan Bridges Speak*.

This is the third event of this project, and it takes place in the framework of UNESCO's global initiative on *Culture: A Bridge to Development*.

For this, we have come together on the bridges of Edirne, Turkey, in November 2012, and of Lovech, Bulgaria, in May 2013 -- to explore the power of culture to strengthen identities, to revitalise economic and social fabrics, to promote dialogue across all borders.

We need more and stronger bridges in our world today, to connect the future and the past, to make the most of our diversity as a force for creativity, for mutual understanding and enrichment.

Culture is the bridge, and the ultimate platform for connection and cooperation between people and communities – this is UNESCO’s core message, embodied in all our Cultural Conventions.

The Gorica Bridge, in the UNESCO World Heritage site of Berat, is an excellent place to renew our commitment to these values, to strengthen the ties that bind us all together as a single community.

And I would like to praise the Mayor of Berat for its commitment to safeguard World Heritage. This bears witness to the role of municipalities and local communities to protect our shared heritage. And this bears witness also to the power of culture for development, for sustainability and citizenship.

The Gorica Bridge tells a story of religious tolerance -- of the conservation of the Orthodox Christian heritage during the Ottoman period, surrounded by the citadel, the Byzantine churches and the mosques.

It tells also a story of intercultural dialogue -- the dialogue that has forged Albania as we know it today, incorporating a variety of ancient influences.

This Bridge, made of wood and then of stone, in the city of Berat, one of the oldest in Albania, has been a witness to the challenges faced by the Albanian people and to the transformation of the country at the heart of Europe.

This reminds us that cultural heritage is not just about stones and monuments. It is about education and dialogue among new generations, it is about finding common places to live together in peace.

I know how deeply the people of Albania are attached to the symbol of the bridge, all over the country -- as the great author Ismail Kadare eloquently expressed in his masterpiece, *The Three Arched Bridge*.

Albania hosts the *UNESCO Regional Centre for the Restoration of Cultural Heritage*, which works for our common goal to protect and promote cultural heritage across the region.

With this initiative, we are seeking to create new spaces for dialogue and action between local authorities, city planners, artists and civil society.

We must encourage truly cross-borders projects, to foster intercultural dialogue and to harness the full power of culture as a dynamic economic and social sector.

This is an opportunity to take our message forward, to recognize culture and creative industries, as drivers for dialogue, job creation, economic growth and, at the same time, as enablers of social cohesion, identity and confidence in the future.

In this spirit, I wish to thank the artists, performers, all our partners, and the *Balkanika Foundation*, for their commitment and support.

Most of all, I thank the people of Berat and all of you who have come tonight to share with this message of peace and hope for the future.

Thank you all, and good evening.