

Ohrid Regional Strategy for Cultural Cooperation in South East Europe

1. Foreword

On 19 July 2004, the Ministers of Culture of South-East European countries and Italy , gathered in Mostar to participate in the **First Ministerial Conference on Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe** (henceforth, SEE). The event, organized within the framework of the inauguration of the reconstructed Old Bridge of Mostar, marked the beginning of a regional cooperation process in the field of culture that is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year.

Inspired by the same principles, and with the aim of setting up a permanent, autonomous mechanism of consultation at a political and institutional level among the countries of the region, on 31 March 2005 the Ministers of Culture of SEE approved the establishment of the **Council of Ministers of Culture of South-Eastern Europe**.

Both initiatives, through different means and in cooperation with a number of international partners, have contributed to the achievement of important results.

In order to further reinforce the coherence and effectiveness of the regional cooperation process, the Ministers of culture of South-East European countries, who met in Brdo pri Kranju (Slovenia) on 8 April 2013, ultimately decided to merge the two above-mentioned initiatives into a unified cooperation platform, under the common title **“Council of Ministers of Culture of South-East Europe – Enhancing Culture for Sustainable Development”** (hereinafter, the Council). The present ministerial platform is therefore intended as the leading initiative for cultural cooperation in SEE, with the specific objective of defining coordinated regional policies and corresponding priority action to deal with current and future challenges.

Accordingly, the Ministers and Heads of delegation gathered in Ohrid, on 28 June 2014, approve the present Regional Strategy for Cultural Cooperation in South-East Europe, and commit to its implementation through reinforced joint action within the framework of the Council.

2. Guiding principles

Based on the experiences developed over the last decade, and considering the purpose of the present document, regional cooperation on culture in South-East Europe shall be inspired by the following principles:

- I. Culture shall be intended as the continuous forming, consolidation and interaction of material, intellectual and emotional features in which groups and societies find expression, promoting values of inclusiveness, openness, and acceptance of the other on grounds of mutual respect and understanding. Such a definition of culture shall include cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) as well as contemporary cultural expressions in all their manifestations, as an indispensable resource for fostering dialogue, integration and sustainable development;
- II. Future action shall be focused on shared priorities defined by the countries of the region through consultation among the respective ministries of culture, based on the activity of the present Council;
- III. Efforts shall be stepped up within operational activities to reinforce and streamline inter-institutional cooperation, with a view to enhancing the cross-cutting relevance of culture with regards to other priority sectors, including but not limited to economic development, education, European integration, rule of law and the respect of fundamental freedoms;
- IV. Within the framework of the international debates on the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda and its subsequent implementation, efforts shall be stepped up to advocate the role of culture for development;
- V. In determining priorities for regional cooperation, the Council shall seek as much as possible to ensure their alignment with the principles, standards, guidelines and programmes of relevant International Organisations and of the European Union;
- VI. While affirming the leading role of the present Council, coordination among the different cooperation frameworks already active in the region shall be further enhanced, in order to streamline the planning of activities and ensure a more effective and efficient use of available human and financial resources;

- VII. The implementation of activities deriving from the present Strategy may leverage whenever appropriate on the operational structures of relevant International Organizations, as well as of the regional networks and Centres the creation of which was endorsed within previous ministerial platforms, with the double aim of ensuring synergic action and avoiding the dispersion of resources in the creation of additional implementing agencies.

3. Priority areas of cooperation

In approving the present strategy, the following fields of action shall be considered as priorities for cultural cooperation in South-East Europe, with the aim of enhancing culture for sustainable development:

- I. Improving the management of cultural heritage for inclusive economic development and environmental sustainability

Efforts in this field shall focus on advancing integrated, inclusive, and participative approaches to the management of cultural heritage, bridging conservation and safeguarding physical assets through the promotion of sustainable uses which seek to contribute to the quality of life of the communities concerned. Action in this area may include the development of sustainable cultural tourism, the promotion of the region's common cultural and natural heritage, the protection of underwater cultural heritage, as well as the reinforcement of cooperation for the management of trans-boundary cultural and/or natural sites;

- II. Fighting the illicit trafficking of cultural property and promoting the restitution of illicitly trafficked exported or imported property

The theft, pillage and illicit trade of artefacts are phenomena that transcend national borders, the fight against which also requires coordinated action at trans-national level. Action in this area shall include the reinforcement of cooperation among national authorities in the region, as well as with relevant International Organizations with regard to capacity-building, sharing of knowledge, prevention, investigation, recuperation, restitution, and awareness-raising;

- III. Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage for inclusive social development and dialogue

As it is a living heritage, associated with the movement and interaction of peoples, intangible cultural heritage also has an important trans-boundary dimension. Regional cooperation shall therefore aim at reinforcing the safeguarding and promotion of this heritage and enhancing its contribution to sustainable development and intercultural dialogue, with special focus on regional networking and multi-national elements;

IV. Fostering creativity and the diversity of cultural expressions for inclusive economic growth and social cohesion

Cooperation in this field shall seek to facilitate the introduction of cultural policies and measures, at both a national and a regional level, that nurture creativity, provide access for creators to domestic and international marketplaces, and ensure these expressions are accessible to the public at large. At the same time, joint efforts shall be stepped up to highlight the value and opportunities that creative and cultural industries bring to sustainable development processes, in particular to advance inclusive economic growth and social cohesion.

V. Development of cultural and arts education in the region for quality education and human development

In recognition of the important role of cultural and arts education in fostering cultural awareness and expression, creativity and diversity, as well as contributing to human development, socio-cultural well-being and social cohesion, regional cooperation in this field will promote the exchange of knowledge and good practices, training and mobility of cultural and educational professionals, and research activities that also result in the preparation of joint projects and networks.

4. Modalities of action

Future action in the above-mentioned fields shall take the form of activities specifically geared at:

- I. Reinforcing international, regional, trans-border, and bilateral activities among countries in the region;
- II. Developing institutional and professional capacities, especially in cooperation with relevant regional Centres, by supporting joint trainings,

- networking of experts, study visits and other cross-border capacity-building activities;
- III. Improving legal, institutional and administrative frameworks, especially through the sharing of knowledge, experience and good practices developed at national level;
 - IV. Supporting the inclusion of culture within development policies and programmes at an international, regional, national, and local level;
 - V. Supporting the production of an evidence base possibly covering the entire region, demonstrating through comparable data the value of cultural and creative industries to advance inclusive economic growth and social cohesion;
 - VI. Supporting mobility and exchange of professionals and students;
 - VII. Encouraging education through culture and the integration of culture within formal and non-formal educational programmes;
 - VIII. Promoting and facilitating regional partnerships for the preparation of joint projects, in particular with regard to EU funding opportunities.

5. Monitoring

In order to reinforce the effectiveness, accountability and credibility of the regional cooperation process, the Council shall ensure effective monitoring, intended to allow for both the assessment of activities and the adjustment of the present Strategy to accommodate evolving priorities.

Such monitoring action shall be entrusted to the Committee of Officials and of ad-hoc expert groups as defined by the Charter (articles 12 to 15), the First Appendix to the Charter, and the Second Appendix to the Charter (article 7). In particular, the Committee of Officials shall have the responsibility of preparing the following documents and submitting them to the Council for approval:

- I. Annual reports on the implementation of the present Strategy;
- II. Possible proposals for amendment;
- III. Action plans for the implementation of the Strategy, whenever needed and appropriate.