

Message from Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister of the
Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, President of the European
Council, to the Varna Regional Forum of Heads of State or
Government on the creation, development and consolidation
of cultural corridors in South-East Europe





Luxembourg, le 18 mai 2005

Dear Colleagues Heads of State and Government, dear Director General of UNESCO, dear Secretary General of the Council of Europe:

The Varna Forum is about culture and heritage. These are fields which have often been underestimated with regard to their actual, deeper meaning for the individual and society as well as to their potential and their added value in human, historic and political terms.

Notwithstanding my having had to decline the kind invitation which was addressed to me by President Parvanov of Bulgaria, host of this conference, it matters a lot to me to mark my presence in another form and thereby state my strong interest in the great project of a common heritage policy for the entire region. This project was launched some two years ago at the level of joint identification and planning and you are presently undertaking to formalise it, with a view to further forging and cementing cultural links within and among your ten countries, i.e. at sub-national, national, trans-border and regional levels.

“Were it to be redone, I would start off with culture” Jean Monnet was quoted by his entourage when one day he was commenting the early days and the development perspectives of the European integration process. Well taken, or even truly well found, if those words were by any chance put into his mouth by someone else.

What better insight may we gain about ourselves - in singular and plural - than, by looking to our past in order to realise where we stand at present and where we wish to strive towards in a future that we hope will be bright and promising and above all devoid of wars and conflicts, which this continent has had its amplest share of and has paid a heavy toll to?

What is true for Europe at large certainly applies to the South-Eastern part of our continent, which has more recently gone through a tormented history, now largely overcome, yet still in need of rehabilitation and stabilisation. Joining the OSCE and the Council of Europe earlier on and now moving towards and into the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance are doubtless catalysts and strongly motivating factors as well as powerful incentives, translatable into truly democratic and market oriented societies, socially equitable political and economic systems, equipped with well functioning judiciary systems and - fundamentally - based on the respect and the rights of the individual.

It is my firm belief, however, that all these large societal and political-economical layers are underpinned by deeply rooted values that countries and the individuals which compose them have detained over centuries, in their memory or even to a large degree in their singular or collective sub-conscience.

The search for a better understanding among persons and peoples, which is an essential precondition for any society to develop harmoniously, must thus rely on relating our present selves to our common history and to all the riches we have gathered over time and share in a privileged way, perhaps without realising to what extent our destinies are linked, for good or for bad.

Heritage, whether cultural or natural, material or immaterial, deserves well thought policies and a coherent development, to the benefit of all those implied.

Both in our individual and collective awareness, cultural policies are by essence inconspicuous and can thus cross borders and penetrate minds rather unreservedly and, above all, peacefully. May I briefly recall that the former CSCE, composed of two ideologically defined blocks and a group of non-aligned countries dealt with each other in an often difficult set of oppositions, but that within and even beyond the so-called "three-baskets" they managed to build up and entertain a certain level of cultural exchange and relations, increasingly so as the Helsinki process moved on, patiently and with its share of setbacks, to eventually bear fruit also in other sensitive areas of security, arms control and disarmament and, most importantly, in the field of human rights.

The preservation and promotion of heritage is source of wisdom. It teaches people who they are, where they have come from, whom they have known in the past, to whom they are related in destiny and what they have in common with others, which, I trust, is more than what may separate them from each other.

History, with all its antagonistic features, should take into account the development of common cultural values, as documented by heritage. It does, I believe, make us better people to realise that we are rich in joint patrimony, be it with regard to architecture, literature, fine arts, religion, tradition, trade routes, industrial heritage and all other influences on our past and present that have shaped our lives and societies.

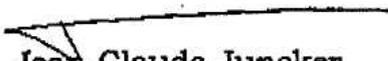
Setting up a continual network of cultural routes in the South-East of Europe, cherishing commonality of destiny and projecting these "cultural corridors" into a shared future is by all means a grand project which deserves large support.

In 1997, the Luxembourg Government approved a proposal by its Minister for Culture to host the European Institute for Cultural Routes in the City of Luxembourg and to support it materially, politically and morally. Had this not been the case, I fear that those excellent programmes, initiated by the Council of Europe in 1987, would have faded out, for lack of resources mainly. As a guardian of the methodology of setting up and linking cultural routes and leaning on the expertise it has gathered in those years, the Institute is an excellent instrument and a remarkable agency of the Council of Europe. It is meant for co-operation in the field of safeguarding and promoting heritage and aims to be accessible to the largest number. I know that this South-Eastern project of yours is realised in close partnership with the Institute and relying on its advice.

Cultural routes policies are ever more related to the firmly emerging notion of cultural tourism, which also bears a promising micro-economic dimension and thereby contributes to social cohesion, which in turn is one of the fundamental goals of this continent to strive for.

It is not surprising that several international Organisations and Institutions are dealing with culture, heritage, architectural patrimony and the like, each in their own particular way. Their presence at this Conference testifies of their interest. In this regard, I myself would strongly appeal never to engage in rivalry, or pulling the blanket one way or another, in institutional competition. Such an approach should be banned because it would distract from the essential. Member States of Institutions wish to see the latter talk to each other, bundle their energies, look for synergies and resolutely engage in cooperation, in principle, and even more so in times of budgetary scarcity.

Let me close by wishing your Conference, its participants and its main subject a lot of successful work. The motto of your Forum: “Cultural corridors in South East Europe, common past and shared heritage - a key to future partnership” could not have been better chosen. Culture may be “the stuff that dreams are made of” as the most famous Elizabethan playwright could have put it, but it is much more. It makes people meet, find each other, understand each other better and hold together. This large South-East European region, rich in cultural abundance and, thus, in diversity, should continue, with the support of Europe at large, to resolutely rebuild confidence, in human terms. This is precisely your common intention, at this Forum. You have my moral and political support. I wish you well.


Jean-Claude Juncker
Prime Minister

President of the European Council