



Address
by Terry Davis
Secretary General of the Council of Europe

*"Communication of Heritage,
a new vision for South-East Europe"*

Forum on Communication of Heritage in South East Europe
Opatija, 1 June 2005

Presidents,
Director-General,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Varna Declaration adopted last May gave rise to an inspiring idea: reviving the historic lifelines of South-East Europe - the lines of interaction between cultures which have left their mark on territories, landscapes, settlements and traditions - and make them a source of new links between peoples.

Great ideas are born every day but few outlive the first critical examination and even fewer survive the test of time.

This Opatija Summit is proof that the idea of reviving these historic lifelines, launched a year ago, was not only fresh but also workable. I willingly embraced this idea, on behalf of the Council of Europe, because it corresponded fully to our thinking on cultural heritage, intercultural dialogue and sustainable community development.

The Council of Europe - together with UNESCO - was the midwife at the birth of this idea. But it also wished to be a caring godparent giving guidance and support to the child on its journey to maturity.

Following the Varna commitment, I encouraged the network of heritage experts on South-East Europe to turn the concept of cultural corridors from a bright idea into a reality.

The task was complex and challenging - but no one said that it would be easy. Allow me to briefly outline the outcome of our work.

First, the guiding principles. They derive from the Council of Europe standards in the field of cultural heritage and in particular from the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the value of cultural heritage for society adopted last year in Faro. The cultural corridors must contribute to **local development** and **sustainable communities** and therefore be able to reconcile several requirements for development - economic growth, preservation of the environment, cultural heritage and diversity. This reconciliation **must be the result of a democratic debate** involving members of the community from different cultural traditions - and lead to a common project reinterpreting the historical legacy in the light of the community's contemporary objectives.

Second, the organisational framework. Our Regional Programme for Cultural and Natural heritage in South East Europe, in which most of

your countries participate, has been extended, with the support of the European Commission, to provide the framework for development, indeed the cradle, for the cultural corridors project. This programme has generated over the past years, the institutional capacity, expertise and networks, which will assist in building the cultural corridors.

Third - the method. We propose to develop, within the next 18 months, the conceptual design for a pilot corridor involving at least three countries. In this endeavour, we rely on our lasting partnership with the European Union, as well as on the intellectual input of other key partners such as UNESCO and the European Cultural Routes Institute.

But the most valuable ally is the determination and commitment of your governments, and their support to the local authorities, civil society organisations and businesses, whose energy and imagination will be the lifeblood of this project.

The corridor is a powerful and omnipresent metaphor: we speak about trade corridors, transport corridors, migration corridors. Today we will fit a few more pieces into the puzzle with a new type of corridor, which, in the spirit of the guiding theme of this Summit can also be called corridors of cultural communication.

Communication is essential for building the dream of a Europe without dividing lines - a continent proud of its heritage and diversity, open to its neighbours and confident in its future.

Communication is pivotal to the Council of Europe action in the field of heritage: at the annual European Heritage Days, millions of Europeans discover treasures of the past usually hidden from the public eye. The European Cultural Routes mobilise public authorities and civil society alike around projects, which educate people about common themes in our diverse heritage.

However, preserving heritage and communicating it to the general public requires knowledge and expertise - we are in this business too, through our training and capacity-building programmes for heritage professionals and the unique pan-European information system HEREIN which helps to disseminate standards and good practice across Europe and beyond.

The cultural corridors are potentially one of the more complex and ambitious projects we have in this field and we look forward to the process and to the result.