



**CULTURAL CORRIDORS OF SOUTH EAST EUROPE
COMMON PAST AND SHARED HERITAGE -
A KEY TO FUTURE PARTNERSHIP
A REGIONAL FORUM**

Varna, May 20-21 2005

**ADDRESS BY H.E. MR. DIMITRIS KOURKOULAS,
HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO THE
REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA**

(Summarized, the original text is not available)

- On behalf of the European Commission, the Ambassador thanked the President of the Republic of Bulgaria for inviting him to this major forum, and thanked the UNESCO Director General and the Council of Europe Secretary General for their valuable contribution to this initiative, which the EU fully supports.
- The Ambassador said the initiative could become an excellent channel of intercultural dialogue and cooperation both in and outside Southeastern Europe. He said the initiative came at a historic moment when, for the first time in contemporary history, the Balkan countries were not divided by geopolitical wars. He said all countries in the region share in the common European fate, and they all adhere to the principles of rule of law, respect for human rights, and peaceful coexistence.
- Congratulated Bulgaria and Romania on signing an Accession Treaty with the EU a few weeks earlier, and expressed his confidence that effective EU membership as of 2007 would open a new chapter for the two countries and for the entire region.
- Recalled that two other countries in the region – Turkey and Croatia – were also expecting to start accession negotiations shortly, and that the Thessaloniki European Council had confirmed the European prospects of the four countries of the Western Balkans.
- Singled out a very important cultural dimension of the forthcoming EU enlargement: the Cyrillic alphabet would become the third writing system for the official EU languages after Bulgaria's accession.
- The Ambassador said that the Varna Declaration, which would be adopted at the current forum, would make a specific contribution to a new era in the development of the region of Southeastern Europe. He said the European Commission was ready to assist the attainment of the objectives of the Varna Declaration by all available means. He said that the Delegation of the European Commission to Bulgaria was proud to have contributed to the early stages of the initiative, and extended special thanks to Prof. Krestev for his commitment and his belief that Phare projects were the best projects for Bulgaria.
- Noted that the European Commission assisted Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia through the policy of structural funds in Greece, and that under this policy important funds were targeted at cross-border cooperation, including cultural cooperation.

- The Ambassador said that in the current year Bulgaria started implementing actively a 30 million euro package of EU-supported cross-border cooperation projects in various fields, including culture, with its five neighbours. He expressed his confidence that all countries in the region would fully avail themselves of the opportunities offered by the new EU neighbourhood policy.
- Said that in the globalizing world of today, every society, every country, every citizen should be open to the global environment. He added that the free movement of goods, people and ideas was as important as the circulatory system of a living organism. That is why, he said, cultural corridors are so important; they not only help us understand the past better, but more importantly, they help us build a better future.