

DG/2000/21  
Original : English

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,  
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by  
Mr Koichiro Matsuura

Director-General  
of the United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural Organization  
(UNESCO)

at the Conference on  
*Development and Security in the Adriatic and Ionian*

Ancona, Italy, 20 May 2000

Mr Prime Minister,  
Mr President of the European Commission,  
Mr Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union,  
Mr Coordinator of the Stability Pact,  
Distinguished Foreign Ministers,  
Distinguished Provincial and Regional Presidents,  
Mr Mayor,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am particularly happy that UNESCO has been invited to attend this Conference on Development and Security in the Adriatic and Ionian region, two seas of common concern to Italy, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece and Slovenia. UNESCO readily associates itself with your praiseworthy commitment to promoting dialogue and cooperation in this region of immense potential. I therefore wish to express my appreciation to our Italian hosts for this noble initiative, which addresses issues that are crucial to the fostering of political and economic stability, as well as peace and security, in the region, thus paving the way to European integration.

I welcome the fact that during the discussions held yesterday, emphasis was placed not only on economic cooperation and the fight against crime but also on the need for coordination in the cultural and educational sectors. Through its expertise in the four main spheres of competence - education, culture, science and communication - UNESCO embraces major issues affecting humankind, and proposes comprehensive approaches that can also be of assistance to you as you address the particular difficulties encountered by South-Eastern Europe. The UNESCO Office in Venice, established with the support of the Italian authorities is an efficient instrument for carrying out our tasks in this region. These are so far-reaching and complex that I could not hope to cover all the related issues in a few short minutes. Let me give you some examples, nevertheless, of our activities in your region.

In the field of the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity, more than 50 sites have already been inscribed on the World Heritage List which bear witness to its rich history and cultural heritage. I have recognised many of them in the beautiful film "The mirroring sea" we have just seen.

Preserving these marvels also means protecting them in times of natural disasters and conflicts. Under the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, UNESCO was very active in Dubrovnik

and offered its assistance in the restoration of the old city. Croatian President, Mr Stipe Mesic, has told me personally how vividly this assistance remains in the collective memory of the Croatian people. Within the framework of the Dayton Commission, UNESCO is listing national monuments in Bosnia and Herzegovina and helping to draw up new legislation on the Protection of Cultural Heritage. In collaboration with the World Bank, we have launched a project for the highly symbolic Old Bridge of Mostar. After the Albanian crisis in 1997, UNESCO declared Butrinti a World Heritage Site in Danger and launched a project for its protection and development.

UNESCO is also working to ensure that the heritage is more fully integrated into the economic and social life of the community and respects the environment. For example, we have a pilot urban development and freshwater resources project in the city of Omisalj (Krk Island, Croatia) to promote sustainable development, with particular emphasis on cultural heritage, water management and the development of tourism.

The success of democratic values and the promotion of civil culture in a region with as historically troubled and complex a context as South-Eastern Europe depends on mutual understanding and good neighbourliness. Education, in particular through teaching of history, human rights and civic education, must play an important role in this regard. UNESCO has also been active in your region. Two recent meetings focussed on the interweaving cultures in South-Eastern Europe and on combating stereotypes in history textbooks in the region. A symposium was held on curricula in Sarajevo; a project is being implemented in Albania to promote the production of unbiased primary and secondary textbooks; and the education system is being rebuilt in Kosovo within the framework of the United Nations Mission there.

Such efforts are only part of a vast undertaking that requires the active participation of governmental authorities, civil society and in particular young people. Under the UNESCO Associated Schools Project, a meeting was organised in Slovenia earlier this month to link schools in the region and enable young people to work on peaceful alternatives to conflict through education. This meeting was held within the framework of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. UNESCO is happy to be an active member of the Task Force on Education established under this European Union initiative.

Another of UNESCO's priorities in the region is to assist in developing strong, independent and democratic media. In this context, UNESCO has supported the activities of Studio B, B2-92, as other independent television broadcasters in Belgrade, by providing them with programming and training assistance. Two days

ago in Paris, I publicly expressed grave concern over the Serbian government's authoritarian measures targeting opposition television broadcaster Studio B and several independent media.

This is but one recent illustration of the obstacles placed in the way of the peacemakers. Yet optimism should prevail, and the Ancona Declaration is a demonstration of the momentum now gathering pace for lasting stability in this region. The efforts towards stability and development in the region are at the heart of UNESCO's vocation and role to promote peace world-wide. Therefore I would like to reiterate my firm commitment that, in close collaboration with the Member States concerned and in partnership with other organizations, UNESCO will increase its cooperation, building upon the region's unique and diverse cultural identities and on its historically close cultural links, as stated in the declaration.

Allow me to express once more my thanks for your invitation.