

Welcome Address

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This conference in the framework of the European Year of Cultural Heritage is an important opportunity. It is a great pleasure to see growing efforts to protect a common heritage of Europe – the border landscape along the former Iron Curtain. These efforts today cross borders which used to be unsurmountable in the past. Interestingly, these border landscapes do not only illustrate places where the past divide was materialised. They also boast ecosystems that could flourish “in the backyard” of the Iron Curtain. In this way, the European Green Belt promotes the conservation of both cultural and natural heritage.

UNESCO already contributes to remembering the legacy of the Iron Curtain through its “Memory of the World” programme. In 2011, this programme included documents related to the “Construction and Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Two-Plus-Four-Treaty of 1990”. In the same year, the launch of the European Heritage Label programme by the European Commission introduced an important new designation which promotes the protection of heritage of European significance and regional leadership in heritage conservation. I believe that the European Heritage Label coupled with the UNESCO “Memory of the World” Programme constitutes significant and meaningful achievements for the promotion and preservation of the legacy of the Iron Curtain.

The awarding of the European Heritage Label to some areas of the European Green Belt is a great achievement for the sustainable conservation of the cultural legacies left by the Iron Curtain. The European Heritage Label raises awareness among the public on the necessity to remember and preserve past legacies. It also contributes towards the goals set by the European Commission to bring an impetus to the Europeanisation of cultural heritage.

I also take this opportunity to highlight the importance of transboundary cooperation, which is central to the successful protection of natural and cultural heritage in its entirety and not just up to the next border. As the motto of this European Cultural Heritage Summit suggests, “shared values” guiding a “shared heritage” calls for transboundary cooperation contributing to sustainable development. Transboundary and transnational cooperation is also one of the foundation stones of the World Heritage Convention.

There is no question that the natural and cultural heritage along the former Iron Curtain should be protected in the national context. One important question at this stage is whether these landscapes need further protection at the international level. Nowadays we can be glad to have a wide range of international designations, the European Heritage Label being one of them. UNESCO offers three site-based designations: Biosphere Re-



serves, Global Geoparks, and World Heritage. In the case of World Heritage, I wish to stress that a nomination for inscription on the World Heritage List must prove that the nominated site is of Outstanding Universal Value for all of humanity. The question would be if the areas of the Iron Curtain are really unique and equally important for all of humanity for their cultural or natural values.

Moreover, World Heritage inscriptions come with great responsibilities. The site also needs to meet highest standards for protection and management. National, regional and local authorities have to comply with many obligations under the 1972 World Heritage Convention. Prior to a potential inclusion on the national Tentative List or nomination, it is therefore important to honestly scrutinise and critically assess the potential and to have an in-depth discussion with stakeholders concerned.

It may also be useful to look at reflections carried out for other regions. Taking other situations into account could be beneficial for stakeholders at different levels, but also for conservation efforts on the ground.

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