

*Regional Centre for the Safeguarding  
of Intangible Cultural Heritage  
in South-Eastern Europe  
Under the Auspices of UNESCO*

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**2012 ACTIVITIES REPORT**

**I. THE BEGINNING**

- The Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in South-East Europe under the auspices of UNESCO started its operations with the official opening of the Centre on 20 February 2012 by the Director-General of UNESCO Ms. Irina Bokova, the Minister of Culture, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the President of the Bulgarian Academy of Science. On that day, a General Assembly of the countries applying to participate in the Centre's activities took place, at which the Centre's articles of association, work plan and other major operating documents were adopted.

**II. INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS**

- On 17 March 2012 representatives of the Regional Centre took part in the UNESCO International Forum *Balkan Visions – Creativity for the Future in South-East Europe*, devoted to UNESCO's new initiative *Culture: a Bridge to Development*, which was officially inaugurated by the Director-General of UNESCO Ms. Irina Bokova at the Ninth Summit of the Heads of State of SEE Countries in Serbia. Mr. Anthony Krause, Head of the Culture Unit at BRESCE, and Mr. Matteo Rosati, Programme Officer, visited Bulgaria to help prepare the forum. The programme of their visit was conducted entirely by the Chairperson of the Management Board and the Centre's employees. The forum took place with the support of the UNESCO Regional Bureau in Europe (BRESCE) and Sofia Municipality within the 16<sup>th</sup> International *Sofia Film Fest*. The UNESCO Deputy Director-General for Culture Mr. Francesco Bandarin was a special guest at the event.
- Representatives of the Regional Centre took part in the first meeting of regional cultural heritage centres in South-East Europe on 23 March in Zadar, Croatia. The issues discussed included cooperation, partnership and funding options, exchange of information on the current state of affairs and the planned activities of the regional centres; improving coordination in the implementation and planning of activities; sharing experience and best practices related to the status, management and sustainability of the centres; consolidating cooperation networks, and promoting the establishment of new partnerships.
- After Ms. Oli Grueva was appointed as Executive Director of the Regional Centre in the beginning of June 2012 and the rest of the full-time staff was hired, the Centre

began its actual, fully-fledged operations. A website in Bulgarian and English was developed, which is currently regularly updated with UNESCO news. As proposed by youths who took part in a workshop on intangible cultural heritage, a discussion and posting forum and a Facebook link were added to the website. Regrettably, no materials have been posted or substantial discussions held there by now.

- The Executive Director of the Centre paid working visits to the UNESCO Secretariat in Paris and the UNESCO's Regional Bureau in Europe (BRESCE) to get acquainted with them and coordinate possible future initiatives. Both the UNESCO and the BRESCE managements in turn stressed the Centre's special role for UNESCO cooperation and their great expectations regarding its activities. Ms. Cécile Duvelle, Chief of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Section, emphasised that the Regional Centre's main tasks in the coming years should be:
  - a) consistent training of national staff from the SEE countries, with the assistance of UNESCO trainers, on the key concepts of the 2003 Convention, identification of the elements of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), promoting the Convention and its aims and tasks, increasing the states' involvement with the needed safeguarding of ICH in the region;
  - b) special attention to youth as a target audience and the youth's role in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage;
  - c) discussing opportunities for submitting multinational applications, subject to strict adherence to the established criteria.
- A series of meetings took place with representatives of Bulgarian educational, scientific and cultural institutions, the managements of universities and non-governmental organisations, which stated their willingness to assist and act as partners to the Regional Centre in its specific initiatives.
- With a view to the need of promoting the Centre and the forthcoming issue of a UNESCO calendar with elements entered into the Representative Lists of ICH, e-mails were sent to the countries with listed elements to request captions and high-definition photos. Albania, Cyprus and Croatia kindly responded, for which we thank them. The rest of the captions and photos were taken from the UNESCO website. The calendar was issued and sent out to the Centre's member states.
- The issuance of a portfolio of SEE elements entered in the Representative Lists of ICH was funded. The portfolio is expected to be released very shortly.
- As proposed by the UNESCO Secretariat, the Regional Centre conducted on 24-25 September 2012 at the National Palace of Culture a training seminar on the topic of *The Role of the Youth in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage. Implementing the 2003 UNESCO Convention in the South-East European Countries*. The following countries were represented by two young participants each: Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Macedonia, Romania, Russia, Slovenia and Bulgaria. The UNESCO guest lecturers invited were Mr. Frank Proschan from the UNESCO Secretariat, Ms. Panayiota Andrianopoulou (Greece) and Mr. Gabor Soos (Hungary).

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- The Regional Centre supported financially the organisation and holding of the Eight Conference of the SEE Ministers of Culture, devoted to intangible cultural heritage, which took place on 25 October. The Executive Director of the Regional Centre Ms. Oli Grueva made a presentation of the Centre. The declaration adopted by the ministers reads: “We welcome the establishment, under the auspices of UNESCO, of the Sofia Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in South-East Europe. We congratulate UNESCO for the support it gives through its national and regional capacity building programmes for the efficient implementation of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage”.
- Upon an invitation by Armenia’s Minister of Culture Ms. Hasmik Poghosyan, the Executive Director of the Centre paid a visit to Yerevan from the 25<sup>th</sup> until the 30<sup>th</sup> of November. The Armenian hosts had prepared an outstandingly rich and intensive programme which included meetings, visits to historical sights, ancient settlements, etc. Armenia stated its willingness to become a full member of the Regional Centre and to actively work for bilateral and multilateral cooperation and joint nominations with the SEE countries. Along these lines we should remind that UNESCO’s initial intention was for the Centre to cover not only the SEE countries but also the Black Sea region, and it was proposed to also gradually include Georgia and Azerbaijan.
- Representatives of the Regional Centre took part in the Seventh Session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which took place from the 3<sup>rd</sup> until the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2012 in Paris. The Session was opened by the Director-General of UNESCO Ms. Irina Bokova. She expressed her high appreciation of the Committee’s work and her satisfaction at the expanded scope of the Convention and at the positive fact that 27 % of the submitted nominations of ICH elements came from the Africa region. The Committee recommended promoting the interest in nominations for entering elements into the Register of Best ICH Safeguarding Practices.
- As regards the applications of elements of SEE countries, the Committee has approved those of Croatia (Klapa multipart singing of Dalmatia), Romania (craftsmanship of Horezu ceramics) and Turkey (the Mesir Macunu festival). The details of these three elements will be uploaded on the Centre’s website.
- Consultations took place with the UNESCO Secretariat (Ms. Cécile Duvelle and Mr. Frank Proschan) and the Bulgarian Permanent Delegation to UNESCO concerning the Centre’s documents and its activities plan for 2013. Ms. Duvelle shared the UNESCO Secretariat’s wish that the Bulgarian Regional Centre should be a model of regional cooperation and a leader among the rest of the regional centres around the world, she stated her satisfaction at the responsiveness and active work of the Centre’s management and reiterated UNESCO’s willingness to fully support it for the sake of its successful activities.
- On 17 December 2012, in pursuance of one of its main purposes, the promotion of the ICH elements in SEE included in the Representative Lists of UNESCO, the Regional Centre, supported by the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Sofia, organised the official premiere of the film *Dervishes – Mystic of the East*. The event was attended by

many representatives of cultural institutions, non-governmental organisations, embassies, research institutes and media.

### **III. RESULTS ACHIEVED**

For the first year of its actual existence, the Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe under the auspices of UNESCO has gradually established the parameters of its activities and currently has the full capacity to further optimise its work and effective coordination and cooperation with member states from SEE. The Regional Centre's activities were organisationally and technically provided for by appointments of permanent and fixed-term staff. A fully equipped office was established, which is now fully functional and serves to coordinate the Centre's daily operations.