



## SEE Heritage network meeting and public debate "Heritage and its misuse in political and ideological causes"

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Ohrid/Skopje, Macedonia, 2-4 July 2007

July 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> marked an unprecedented meeting of cultural heritage NGOs working in the South-East European region. Representatives hailing from twelve NGOs (with the three newcomers marked in boldface) – Albanian National Trust, Butrint Foundation, and MJAFT! Movement from Albania; Cultural Heritage without Borders, Regional Office from Bosnia Herzegovina; EC MA NDRYSHE from Kosovo; FOSIM (Foundation Open Society Institute Macedonia) from Macedonia; Center for Cultural Heritage Projektor, EXPEDITIO Center for Sustainable Spatial Development and Notar Center for Preservation and Promotion of Kotor Documentary Heritage from Montenegro; and Association for Rehabilitation of Cultural Heritage ARCH, Civic Association SUBURBIUM and Europa Nostra Serbia from Serbia – arrived in Skopje, Macedonia on Monday to kick off the third SEE (South-East European) Heritage Network meeting. The goal of this conference was to discuss how these organizations, through the further development of the network, could jointly contribute to the preservation and promotion of the region's rich cultural heritage as a tool for sustainable and responsible development.

This third meeting, a follow-up to the two previous gatherings in Sarajevo, Bosnia Herzegovina (September 2006) and Gjirokastra, Albania (December 2006), was successfully organized by FOSIM and supported by OSI (Open Society Institute) Network Program East-East: Partnership without Borders. It provocatively opened with a successful public debate on "Heritage and its misuse in political and ideological causes," which was extensively covered by the media and spearheaded by three distinguished guest speakers (Professor Dr. Vjeron Katunarić, Faculty of Philosophy, Zagreb, Croatia; Nebojsa Milikic, Cultural Center Rex, Belgrade, Serbia; and Dr. Lazar Shumanov, Macedonian National Committee of ICOMOS, Skopje, Macedonia). After brief presentations the floor was opened up to the public, which included the aforementioned NGOs in addition to representatives from other interested local organizations, to heatedly discuss problems such as the under-representation of minorities' cultural heritage, the protection of endangered heritage from uncontrolled urbanization, and the irresponsible mushrooming of new cultural structures being wielded for political purposes.

The group then proceeded to Ohrid where they spent two productive days hashing out the most salient issues facing the network's development: the soon-to-be-launched website, the definition of South-East Europe, the accession process for new members, the presentation of specific projects as well as the discussion of future collaborations, and the network's strategic plan 2007-2009. Although many subjects of interest were scrutinized and each debate within the group generated further enlightenment and understanding, two outcomes emerge as the most significant: (1) The decision to include Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania in the network, and (2) the joint production and ceremonial signing of the Membership Declaration, a document professing the network's values, commitment and vision. The document's vision statement strongly sums up its contents: "We set forth our common vision to develop and preserve the multicultural heritage in our countries in order to promote a SEE-region where people cooperate, understand and respect each other based on their cultural differences.

The meeting's last moments were full of inspirational comments and hopes for the future. As one member from Montenegro, where the network plans to organize its next meeting in November, concluded: "I have participated in various networks like this one, but they never went beyond two meetings. I don't know what makes this one different, but it is." The network's commitment to help SEE communities cultivate sound cultural heritage values may be as immovable as some of the heritage it seeks to protect.