

**Address of the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia,  
Mr Blagoj STEFANOVSKI**

Dear Representatives of UNESCO-ROSTE,  
Dear Representatives of UNIDROIT and INTERPOL,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me particular pleasure and great satisfaction that I am here with you today to mark the beginning of the Regional Meeting "Prevention of illicit traffic and other illegal actions related to cultural properties".

The pleasure is all the greater due to the fact that we have here with us eminent experts from Italy, world leaders in the protection of cultural heritage and a country with great experience in the area of prevention.

The Republic of Macedonia, as well as the neighbouring countries, is all part of a region with respectable cultural tradition. As a region where various cultures have crossed and where layers of civilizations have intertwined, numerous invaluable artefacts have been preserved.

Unfortunately, as all valuables, these artefacts have also been the target of illegal activities, such as illicit excavations, illicit trafficking and exporting abroad.

When invaluable objects of this kind leave the territory of the country of origin through illegal channels, it becomes very difficult to follow them and to secure their recovery.

This is why, the prevention of these kind of unlawful activities is a key factor in decreasing the risk of permanent loss of cultural heritage.

In order for this presentation to be implemented successfully, it is necessary to establish close cooperation between all factors that work on the security of cultural heritage.

The various offices and Sectors in the competent Ministries of Culture and Interior, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the courts as well as the customs services have to maintain close coordination at all times.

However, even more important is the regional cooperation and the cooperation with international institutions, in order to undertake the necessary measures or decreasing the losses and damaging consequences.

The Regional Meeting that begins today is an exceptional opportunity for an exchange of valuable experience among the experts from different fields that are directly involved in safeguarding cultural heritage.

In this sense, I am very pleased that the Program of this meeting includes eminent theoretical presentations that depict the current situation and the new approaches in the area of prevention from unlawful actions against cultural heritage. The passing of the new National Action Plan for preventing of crime against cultural heritage will be a major step forward in the field of prevention and protection of cultural heritage.

Allow me, on this occasion, to reiterate my highest respect towards these initiatives and to wish you much success in your work.

Thank you.

