



Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia
UNESCO
International Centre for Underwater Archaeology, Zadar, Croatia

**FIRST EXPERTS MEETING ON THE PROTECTION
OF THE UNDERWATER CULTURAL HERITAGE
IN SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN**

Zadar, Croatia, 1- 4 October 2009

JOINT STATEMENT

We, the participants in the First Experts Meeting on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe (SEE) and the Mediterranean, gathered in Zadar, Croatia, on 1-4 October 2009, thank UNESCO and particularly the UNESCO Office in Venice – BRESCE, and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Cooperazione Italiana for their generous support to this event. We are also grateful to the host country Croatia and the Croatian Ministry of Culture for having hosted us in the city of Zadar.

We underline that the establishment in Zadar of the International Centre for Underwater Archaeology as Category II Centre under the auspices of UNESCO, approved by the UNESCO General Conference in 2007, stems from the common interest of UNESCO Member States to strengthen international cooperation in the field of underwater archaeology and in particular their commitment to fully implement the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, as confirmed by the First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention.

This meeting also follows previous meetings in SEE on the protection and promotion of cultural heritage, which all emphasised the importance of underwater archaeology, and in particular: the Third Ministerial Conference on Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe (Ohrid 2006); the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe (Zadar, 2007); the Summit of the Heads of State of South-Eastern Europe - Intercultural Encounters on Maritime, River and Lake Routes (Athens, 2008), and the latest South-East European Regional Summit Forum, held in Montenegro on 2009.

Convinced that this event represents an important step in safeguarding the universal value of the underwater cultural heritage, also as a matter of international cultural cooperation;

And remarking the high importance of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, the experts participating in this meeting have endorsed the following major objectives and guidelines for future action:

1. Invite all UNESCO Member States to ensure full recognition of the importance of underwater heritage as a component of a country's cultural heritage and an expression of its cultural diversity, and encourage all countries participating in this workshop to ratify the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage of 2001; in this sense, we underline the importance that also islands as well as landlocked countries ratify the Convention and ensure the protection of their underwater heritage according to the Convention's provisions;
2. Support the exchange of knowledge and good practices between the countries of South-Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, with special focus on the implementation of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage of 2001 and on the definition of related policies;
3. Encourage researchers and research institutes from different countries to reinforce cooperation and strengthen the sharing of information on their works and findings in order to enhance respective knowledge on common research subjects, especially in case the latter are of a trans-border nature;
4. Propose the creation of a network of experts on underwater cultural heritage from South-East European and Mediterranean countries, specialised in different fields of research, conservation, restoration and management, where the International Centre for Underwater Archaeology in Zadar would form its basis;
5. Propose the organisation of annual seminars of the experts network to be possibly held at the International Centre for Underwater Archaeology in Zadar, as well as the creation of an on-line forum for facilitating collaboration and communication flow between the experts from all concerned UNESCO Member States;
6. Support the application of an integrated concept of cultural heritage management, in order to couple conservation aspects with the contribution that underwater heritage can offer to sustainable development;
7. Remark that an increased awareness and knowledge about the richness of underwater cultural heritage is a necessary condition for ensuring a more effective protection of this legacy; consequently, we encourage all professionals in this field – irrespectively from their area of specialisation – to step up efforts in order to better promote and present the value of underwater heritage, with regard to institutional and government levels as well as to the wider public. In this regard, we underline the importance of developing specific policies and communication tools in order to ensure a wider access to the underwater heritage (including virtual access), while at the same time ensuring its preservation;
8. Invite all UNESCO Member States and the World Heritage Committee to reserve special consideration for the inscription of underwater sites and assets into the UNESCO World Heritage List;

9. Highlight the importance of considering, during the implementation of the Convention, its complementary nature with regard to the whole legal framework constituted by the UNESCO cultural conventions. This also entails the importance of ensuring effective coordination mechanisms between all institutions and stakeholders involved in the implementation of the different conventions, since only such an integrated approach can allow to fully tap the potential of these instruments in terms of safeguarding and promotion of cultural heritage and cultural diversity;
10. Unanimously encourage to present this Joint Statement and the major conclusions of this seminar on occasion of the following meetings: the sixth Ministerial Conference on Cultural Heritage in SEE, supported by UNESCO; the International Congress on Underwater Archaeology in 2011; the Second Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage; as well as at other relevant international gatherings.

Zadar, Croatia, 4 October 2009