

**Speech Delivered at the Fourth Ministerial Forum on Cultural Cooperation  
between PR China and Central and Eastern European Countries**

**Republic of Bulgaria**

*25 November 2019, Skopje*

**Dear Minister Ismaili,**

**Dear Ministers,**

**Dear heads of delegations,**

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is a great honor and privilege for me to be here with you today and to participate in the Fourth Ministers' Forum between People's Republic of China and Central and Eastern European Countries on Culture Cooperation.

The Minister of Culture of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mr. Boil Banov, could not be with us today, due to urgent official commitments. On his behalf and at his request, I convey to you his greetings and sincere wishes for the success of the Forum.

I would like to address our Greek colleagues, in order to congratulate them on their first participation in a cultural forum after their annexation as full-fledged members of the '17+1' initiative.

As hosts of the Second Forum on Cultural Cooperation that was held in November 2015 in Sofia, we understand how much motivation and conviction are needed to hold up the cause of culture.

Culture is important to all and it is no coincidence that for the fourth time in the framework of our cooperation, we are dedicating a high-level forum to it. The encounter with culture activates all our senses, provokes us, evokes emotions and feelings. Culture allows us to perceive reality differently and thus helps us to distinguish ourselves from the pragmatic perspective of the world as a whole.

Due to its extraordinary potential to promote change in society, culture is perceived not only as one of the most promising sectors of development, but also as an important tool that can support the development of others. This power is manifested in its impact on individuals as well as on society as a whole. The combination of respect for cultural diversity and the ability of culture to unite around shared values guarantees peaceful coexistence, prosperity and solidarity

between people. Culture, like no other, not only fosters creative thinking and provokes innovations that create higher levels of growth and employment, but also contributes to addressing different demographic and social issues, territorial cohesion, and the development of intellectual capital.

I am pleased to note that the process of cultural cooperation between our countries is progressing and expanding. It contributes to our knowledge and mutual understanding of one another, it supports the positive development of our societies while fully respecting their cultural diversity, and encourages concrete actions based on information exchange. Here it is the place to welcome the initiative of the Republic of Northern Macedonia (RNM) for the development of the *'17+1' Cultural Cooperation* web platform. It will certainly facilitate online communication, our coordination and cooperation.

We have already established that the '17+1' initiative offers good opportunities for an open dialogue on these goals. Their achievement is linked to the identification of thematic areas for cooperation and the implementation of specific initiatives, which our colleagues from RNM have defined perfectly in the *Skopje Declaration* and in the *2020-2021 Culture Cooperation Plan* - promotion of cultural heritage, film production and distribution, cultural and creative industries, music, libraries and other important topics.

In parallel with such important topics as the preservation of cultural heritage and the development of contemporary arts, our attention should also be focused on the cultural and creative industries, as well as the audiovisual sector.

Despite the positive development of the cultural and creative industries in recent years, we believe that there are a number of challenges that exist both nationally and globally. In this regard, we welcome the seminar, set out in the Declaration, for an exchange of views on the current challenges for the cultural and creative sectors and exchange of ideas for support, promotion and development in this field. A focus on the traditional craftsmanship of jewelry is a good way to link specific craftsmanship and contemporary design practices.

Investments in culture and creativity are an important prerequisite for securing a sustainable future. Culture and creativity are at the heart of innovation and give birth to new ideas. At the same time, they shape our future cultural heritage.

We are all united and uphold the importance of the inherent role of culture in our societies. However, it also makes a significant contribution to economic growth, notably in integrating cultural and creative sectors and cultural heritage in other sectors, such as in tourism.

As a measurable contribution to the economy and employment, the intellectual value of the works of the cultural and creative sectors is an important element that should be respected, because it is a major intangible asset for artists. It reflects not only their ideas but also their creative path and cultural background.

The audiovisual collaboration is also a fruitful environment and provides opportunities for many interactions. Digital technologies and the online environment make it much easier for European works to reach audiences in the People's Republic of China. On the other hand, we, the Central and Eastern European countries, could also enjoy quality and professional Chinese audiovisual works.

Another focus in our audiovisual collaboration could be coproductions. Through them, practices are successfully exchanged, foreign artists' ideas are developed, synergies are conducted, sustainable networks for future common creative projects are created and one learns of different cultures.

In conclusion, allow me to make the following summary. Culture makes our modern dynamic world beautiful and interesting. It is the force field in which numerous differences, landmarks, creative inspiration and ideas are exchanged. It helps us learn in the easiest and most accessible way possible more about each other, which makes us even more open and tolerant.

I believe that this meeting will lead to a broadening of the dialogue in this direction and will support our joint efforts to reinforce precisely this role of culture. A role which places her high on our political agenda.

I wish success to our Forum!

Thank you for your attention.