

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

Republic of Croatia

Dear Prime Minister Zaev,

Dear Minister Hysni Ismaili,

Dear Minister Luo Shungang,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honor to participate in this meeting on behalf of Minister Obuljen Koržinek and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia. I would also like to thank you for an exceptionally warm welcome to the Fourth Meeting of the Ministers of Culture. We are looking forward to continuing close cooperation within the Initiative that represents the bridge between China and seventeen countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Furthermore, I would like to commend our host, Minister Ismaili and the Ministry of Culture of North Macedonia, for their effort invested in fostering the connections and exchange of artists and cultural professionals between various member states, achieved through North Macedonia's Cultural Cooperation Coordination Center between China and Central and Eastern European countries, which was founded at the Forum held two years ago in the beautiful Chinese city of Hangzhou. The Declaration that is to be adopted will officially present our converging views on the cooperation among all countries participating in the 17+1 Initiative, and will serve as a signpost in the journey we have undertaken.

This document will further enhance cooperation through the platform shared by China and 17 countries of Central and Eastern European countries. It will open up new avenues for acquiring knowledge and skills, as well as networking and connections among our artists and experts, it will foster the transfer of knowledge and good practices, and it will promote cultural diversity, mobility of artists, professionals and youth, as well as the diversity of culture in the participating member states.

And that is not all – all cultural stakeholders in this Platform, which is incorporated in the wider context of One Belt One Road Initiative, will arrange mutual participation at international festivals in order to win and raise new generations of audiences and to enable each country to increase its visibility in

the global art landscape, to translate and publish literary works, and to forge cooperation in the area of the preservation of cultural heritage through the development and implementation of joint projects. Together, we have articulated our expectations and committed to seeing progress for everyone concerned and to sparking a more intensive cultural exchange and exchange of people at a formal level in the intertwining areas of education, culture and art.

The idea of using culture and cultural and creative industries to underpin economic progress stems from the practices as old as mankind in itself. This idea is about rediscovering old routes our ancestors used not only for the exchange of goods, but also for the exchange of knowledge of different lifestyles, traditions, and philosophies. Different nations use culture to brand their cities and countries, which is in international relations known as using *soft power*. Nowadays we witness the cultural diversity being utilised with increasing intensity – in this context, art is perceived as an element of cooperation in international relations and as a means of positioning for individual countries that wish to make an impact in the world. The benefits of cultural diplomacy and its "soft power" are signified by the power of persuasion which strives towards a better and more fruitful understanding among nations. To put it simply, art can reach places that are traditional diplomacy cannot. Art opens the doors to dialogue among cultures and nations because it builds trust and creates long-standing and, often, personal ties that facilitate and foster further cooperation.

Allow me to bring your attention to Croatia's and China's special bilateral project pursued throughout this year in the area of culture and arts. I am also proud to say that from April to December Croatia and China have participated in various activities to present themselves in the year officially termed *The Year of Culture and Tourism in Croatia and China*. Cultural activities and events organised for that occasion have been extremely important – so far they have been the greatest and hitherto unmatched opportunity when it comes to the promotion of Croatian culture and arts and introducing contemporary artists to Chinese audiences. Likewise, they have certainly been a wonderful opportunity for Croatian audiences to learn about Chinese cultural heritage. We also think of it as a precious tool for forging closer ties between Croatia and China.

The Year of Culture and Tourism in Croatia and China has been one of Croatia's key projects in international cooperation in 2019. Its aim has been to help establish a steady partnership between institutions in the area of culture and tourism. The project is a result of joint effort and collaboration of Croatia's Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China.

The Year of Culture and Tourism in Croatia and China has presented more than fifteen Croatian and Chinese arts and culture programmes, including exhibitions, theatre performances, concerts, and professional collaboration between organisations specialising in the protection of cultural heritage.

The Year of Culture and Tourism in Croatia and China began with a grand opening of the exhibition entitled “Ancient Chinese Scholar-Officials: Painting and Life”, as part of the China+17 Summit, which then continued in Dubrovnik. The Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia Andrej Plenković and the President of the State Council of the People's Republic of China E. Li Keqiang honoured the occasion by opening the exhibition.

Throughout the year we have been enjoying China’s contemporary theatre and dance productions, folk dances and grand features of Chinese heritage such as calligraphy, porcelain, and other specific aspects. In turn, Croatia has presented its own contemporary artists, folklore, children’s theatres, and experts for underwater heritage. As a grand finale, the Tamburitza Orchestra of the Croatian Radiotelevision has recently had a series of concerts for Chinese audiences in the City of Chengdu. The Orchestra presented Croatian traditional music performed on this type of string instrument and the way this tradition is being preserved in Croatia.

The program and the exchanges in the areas of culture, arts and tourism have emerged from the idea of bringing Croatia and China closer together, which, I must say, we have accomplished successfully. Our collaboration has fortified our ties and laid the foundations for a number of joint projects in the future. This project has given us a new road to partnership and mutual respect, and allowed us to establish and intensify cultural and tourist routes with a view to increasing the visibility of both countries. We are reviving the memory of the famous Silk Road, which once facilitated the exchange of not only commercial but also cultural goods, languages, philosophies, science and arts between eastern and western civilizations, thus having connected the East and the West for over 1600 years.

Through this project, China had the opportunity to get to know arts and culture of Croatia, a country whose tourist attractions have only just begun receiving more attention from Chinese citizens, in part thanks to the sporting achievements of our national teams. We hope that the partnerships we have established will continue long after this project ends.

We also believe that the good practices of collaboration in the areas of culture and tourism, established during *The Year of Culture and Tourism in Croatia and China*, will serve as a model for strengthening and enriching the exchange between the countries participating in the Platform.

The People's Republic of China has the support of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia for the establishment of a Chinese Cultural Centre in Zagreb that will serve as another important point of contact and ensure our ties become ever more substantial.

Croatia is currently engaged in the preparations for the year 2020, when assume the Presidency over the Council of the European Union. Likewise, in about one month's time, the City of Rijeka will officially become the European Capital of Culture. I would like to emphasise the importance of the European Capital of Culture project for the whole Republic of Croatia because it opens the doors to dialogue, cooperation and support for artists and cultural institutions – not only our own, but of other countries as well. I firmly believe that this content-rich, diverse and all-embracing program will have a positive impact on the society as a whole, especially because it targets the youth and aims at giving them a boost in terms of mobility and education so that they could become active participants in arts and culture – the areas that are going to become more accessible thanks to modern digital technologies and increasing digital and media literacy.

Thank you!