

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

**Slovak Republic**

Honourable Prime Minister Zaev,

Honourable Minister Ismaili,

Honourable ministers,

Your excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

it is a great honour for me to attend this meeting on behalf of the minister of culture of the Slovak Republic, Ľubica Laššáková, and I would like to thank you for your invitation. This is our fourth meeting and demonstrates that the plan established at the first joint meeting to create an active platform for cultural cooperation at all levels between the People's Republic of China and the Central and Eastern European Countries is being actively put into practice.

Culture is the internal framework of every society; it determines a society's values and helps to shape its unique identity whether on the level of a country, a people or a local community.

Cultural cooperation is an important and effective instrument for presenting national cultures abroad; it can increase a country's visibility and can also provide a major stimulus to the development of economic relations and economic cooperation. Cooperation with the People's Republic of China also has the active support of the Member States of the European Union, for which China is a strategic and geographical priority. In a changing world, both the European Union and the non-EU countries that are actively involved in cultural projects related to the cooperation between China and the 17 Central and Eastern European Countries have many common interests that can provide a basis for continuing development and the promotion of cooperation. This is further

encouraged by the richness and diversity of all aspects of cultural life in every country, the presentation of which to others creates an interesting basis for our nations to get to know each other in an active way because each of us is unique.

Our aim is to continue the trend of rich cultural exchange with the People's Republic of China and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, with whom bilateral cooperation in the field of culture has intensified thanks to the creation of this common format. Cooperation between our countries is also intensifying thanks to our active participation in the joint cultural activities under this format.

The Slovak Republic has now concluded agreements on cooperation in the area of culture with nearly all participants in the format China and 17 Central and Eastern European Countries; these agreements have already facilitated reciprocal stays for artists, translators and writers and guest performances on national stages for opera, ballet and dance companies. We also have exchanges of film screenings and of exhibitions of major works of art and important collections from our national museums and galleries; there is active cooperation between experts on cultural heritage, including the digitisation of heritage. Undoubtedly, the new Skopje Declaration on Cultural Cooperation 2020-2021 between China and 17 Central and Eastern European Countries, which we will ceremonially adopt at the end of the present meeting, will contribute to the development of this cooperation.

Despite the large geographical distance between our countries, cultural exchange between China and the Slovak Republic is relatively well developed. The Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic is keen to provide intensive support for bilateral cooperation with China even going beyond the terms of the "Programme for Cultural Cooperation between the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China 2020 - 2024". Our main aim is to continue reciprocal support for events in Slovakia and China in all areas of culture, including the creation of conditions for further development and support for social projects and activities within the cooperation format China and 17 Central and Eastern European Countries.

Since our first meeting in this format in China, Slovak artists and experts from various fields of the arts, cultural heritage, the audiovisual industry and the cultural and creative industries have taken the opportunity for active involvement in joint initiatives leading to meetings, increased sharing of experience and opportunities to present work. Through these exchanges, we are not only intensifying our cultural interaction but also working towards the more significant goal of helping other nations to understand the culture and diversity of our country and providing active support for the presentation in Slovakia of the culture of other countries in the group.

I fully endorse the proposed activities defined in the new declaration. Here I would like to highlight in particular the cooperation in the cultural and creative industries, which are currently among the priority issues for the Slovak Republic because we see these industries playing a key role as a catalyst and disseminator of innovation. Such cooperation stands out because it involves building bridges between art, culture, business and technology. Another noteworthy factor is that the cultural and creative industries contribute more than any other sector to the employment of youth and women and its impact is not limited to culture and creativity but has a significant positive socio-economic and socio-cultural effects on the overall sustainable development of the territory. I therefore take a very positive view of the activities of the format of China and 17 Central and Eastern Europe Countries in this area focussing on the mutual exchange of knowledge and information on current challenges in the cultural and creative industries, as well as the sharing of experience and good practice as a source of inspiration for the creation of new tools to support, promote and develop these sectors. Against this background, it is certainly important to continue these activities in the future, including continued promotion of intensive cooperation, especially the collaboration of policy makers with a strategic grasp of this issue, and ideally we should expand the scope of cooperation to include the running of joint promotional events to increase the visibility of the products of the cultural and creative industries and raise awareness of the sector's significant contribution to the overall economy of each state.

Another of our priorities for cooperation in this format is to continue cooperation related to tangible and intangible cultural heritage. It is imperative that we focus attention on promoting direct cooperation between institutions

involved in the protection of cultural heritage and the exchange of professional staff from museums and galleries.

It is no less important that our joint activities in the coming years also focus on supporting and developing the culture of national minorities and ethnic groups, as well as making culture accessible to disadvantaged sections of the population.

Last but not least, I would like to praise the activities of the Coordination Centre for Cultural Cooperation between China and the 17 Central and Eastern Europe Countries in Skopje. I am convinced that the Centre has already proved its worth as a major cultural hub and a strong basis for our further cooperation in the field of culture. In this context, I would like to thank all the representatives who have been involved in the preparation of today's Ministerial Forum and the new Declaration on Cultural Cooperation covering the next two years.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let us aim to succeed in our joint efforts and to derive a great deal of fresh inspiration from this forum and its specific follow-up activities.

Thank you for your attention.