



## Iran's cultural diplomacy in Europe

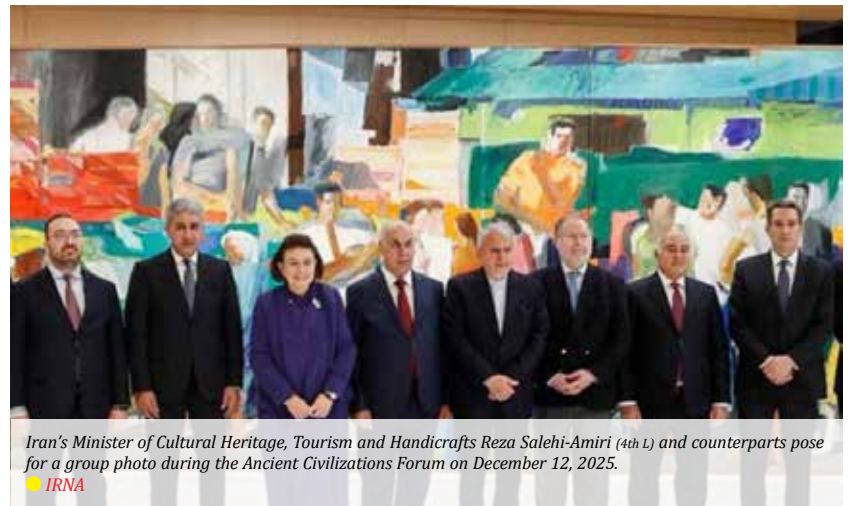
# Greece backs Iranian museum show, discusses direct flights

### Arts & Culture Desk

Greece has expressed support for a major exhibition of Iranian artifacts and signaled willingness to discuss easing visas and restoring direct flights, Iran's minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri said in Athens. The talks also advanced plans for a joint "Persepolis-Acropolis" symphony and a long-term cultural agreement. Salehi-Amiri, who arrived on December 11 to attend the Ancient Civilizations Forum, said both governments had "a clear path" to improve travel links, IRNA reported. He added that Athens welcomed Tehran's proposal to stage the museum show at the Byzantine and Christian Museum and supported the joint symphonic project. Greek culture minister Lina Mendoni described the cultural ties as "unbreakable" and said she saw no limits to cooperation. Earlier on Thursday, Salehi-Amiri met Iranian-studies scholars, Greek academics and tourism agencies to press for deeper people-to-people links. He described Iran as "one of the safest and most attractive" destinations and said visi-

tors return with an image "completely different" from prevailing stereotypes. He noted that lack of direct flights and visa complexities were "the main obstacles" to higher tourism flows and required bilateral work. Greek agency managers reiterated these barriers, urging technical coordination to open the route. Cultural figures recommended easier travel, joint research projects, and regular academic exchanges to rebuild connections weakened over recent decades. Salehi-Amiri said Iran was ready to host Greek artists and craft producers, proposing joint bazaars and exhibitions to showcase both nations' traditions. He highlighted Iran's rich handicrafts sector and said museums, orchestras, and conservation bodies should underpin long-term programs. He confirmed that Tehran and Athens plan to establish a joint committee to draft a comprehensive cultural and tourism agreement. Mendoni said the accord could be finalized promptly and asked both sides to work on a tight schedule.

At the Ancient Civilizations Forum on December 12, held beside the Acropolis, Salehi-Amiri warned that digital forgery and AI-generated historical inaccuracies threaten shared heritage. He said cultural sites in Afghanistan and Syria had suffered heavily and any strike on heritage damages the "collective memory" of nations. He also referenced Israel's recent strike on Iranian territory, noting that cultural centers remain exposed during military crises. Salehi-Amiri said Iran, with millions of artifacts and dozens of UNESCO-listed sites, favors practical collaboration over mere statements. He called for joint action against antiquities smuggling and coordinated responses to climate-driven damage to archaeological zones. He proposed establishing a council of universities from ancient civilizations as the forum's research arm and said Iran's historic University of Gondishapur was ready to lead. Delegates discussed technical cooperation, specialist exchanges, and data-sharing on climate risks.



During his Athens visit, Salehi-Amiri promoted wider academic exchanges, student mobility, and collaboration between Iran's Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Greek scientific centers. He highlighted shared work on restoration and underwater heritage.

He also cited the Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra's performance at Persepolis and suggested a joint "Persepolis-Acropolis" orchestra in Athens and Shiraz. Mendoni called the idea "inspiring and achievable" and said Greece was prepared to move swiftly.

## Curtains down on Int'l Theater Festival for Children and Youth

### Stage art event conveys values to Iran's next generation

### Arts & Culture Desk

The 30th International Theater Festival for Children and Youth closed on Thursday in the western city of Hamedan, where senior Culture Ministry officials said the event gives artists a rare chance to pass ethical, educational and creative messages to what they called Iran's "future builders." Mohammad-Reza Javadi, head of the Culture Ministry's Hamedan office, said in a video message that the festival offers

an "valuable opportunity" for theater groups to convey moral and educational themes to young audiences through "creative, appealing and effective" performances, ILNA reported. He said one of the festival's core missions is to boost joy, hope and a sense of responsibility among children and teenagers. Mohammad-Mehdi Ahmadi, the culture minister's senior adviser and acting arts deputy, attended the ceremony at the Avicenna Cultural Center, where the

festival named winners in six categories. This year, 63 troupes staged 193 shows in 16 indoor venues and several outdoor and street sites across the city, drawing more than 70,000 spectators. Hamid-Reza Haji-Babai, deputy speaker of parliament and Hamedan's representative, said the city has held on to the festival for 30 years and intends to secure it permanently. He recalled that Hamedan once hosted Iran's children's film festival but "lost it due to neglect." He noted that Iran's Su-

preme Leader, during a 2004 visit, said a historic city like Hamedan remains "active in a way unmatched elsewhere," a remark that later led to its designation as Iran's capital of history and civilization. Haji-Babai said officials are drawing up a formal charter to register the event as a permanent national festival so it can run each year "without ambiguity." He argued that Hamedan's archeological heritage, local artistic talent and its transport and academic hubs make it the natural host.

Festival director Azadeh Ansari said in a video message that this year's theme, "today's child, a new narrative, tomorrow's stage", came to life in shows filled with color, sound and "hope." She said young spectators responded with attentive silences and bursts of applause, showing how sharply they observe the world. She thanked the judges, crews and residents of Hamedan for supporting the event, adding that preparations for next year's 31st edition will begin immediately.

## Iran opens new school for expatriates in Doha



Iran's Education Minister Alireza Kazemi and Qatar's Education Minister Lolwah bint Rashid bin Mohammed Al Khater cut the ribbon to inaugurate a new Iranian school for expatriates in Doha, December 11, 2025.  
● PANA

### Social Desk

Iran inaugurated a large, state-of-the-art school for its expatriate community in Doha on Thursday, marking a key expansion of educational and cultural ties between Tehran and Doha. The ceremony took place in the presence of Iran's Minister of Education Alireza Kazemi and Qatar's Minister of Education and Higher Education Lolwah bint Rashid bin Mohammed Al Khater, dolat.ir reported. Officials said the school is among the largest and most

technologically equipped Iranian institutions outside Iran. It features modern classrooms, science laboratories, a library, and extensive extracurricular facilities, providing a comprehensive curriculum for Iranian students living in Qatar. Kazemi described the facility as a step to "elevate access to quality schooling for Iranian students abroad" and said it will strengthen both educational continuity and cultural identity for families overseas. The visit also included the opening of the first overseas branch of Iran's student-focused PANA news agency in

Doha. The office will train young reporters, foster student journalism, and expand media coverage of educational and cultural initiatives within the Iranian diaspora. Kazemi framed the school and media office as part of a "commitment to educational excellence and cross-border cooperation," underscoring Iran's strategy to integrate cultural and educational outreach into its international diplomacy. The Doha school will begin full classes in early 2026, enrolling students from primary through secondary levels. Officials anticipate it will serve as a hub for extracurricular programs, cultural events, and ongoing educational exchanges between Iran and Qatar.

## Iraq's freeze-and ...

When the Trump administration came to power, the pressure became significantly harsher through sanctions and overt threats. Given Iraq's fear of renewed unrest, the government tried to maintain balanced relations with the US. As a result, it undertook several financial and banking measures to ensure cooperation with Washington in the monetary sphere. Iraqi officials argued that they had no alternative, they could not ignore the US-dominated international financial system, especially since Iraq urgently needs reconstruction after the war against Daesh. That is why Baghdad has aligned its financial system with international sanctions regulations. Regarding resistance groups, US authorities have repeatedly monitored Iraqi channels and warned Baghdad that continuing military or financial support for Hezbollah would expose Iraq to serious retaliation. Iraqi officials have repeatedly stressed in interviews that Baghdad does not wish to take sides; the government aims to keep out of the confrontation while adhering to the international banking system. As noted, after the Central Bank's announcement, even the bank itself appeared unsure how to proceed, not

expecting the decision to appear in the gazette, a publication that ordinary citizens rarely monitor. The bank was reportedly caught off guard and sent a letter to the prime minister seeking clarification. But following street protests and public outrage, the prime minister, who was already under pressure, quickly moved to withdraw the measure. Attention now shifts to the upcoming FATF plenary meeting, since the committee had invoked not only Resolution 1373 but also the CFT, which allows states to define terrorism based on domestic law. Because neither of the two groups is listed as terrorist organizations inside Iraq, removing them from the committee's list will not trigger major financial consequences, such as the cancellation of investment contracts. No disruption of economic ties with Iraq is expected as a result of their removal either.

### Can this be seen as part of the Iraqi government's effort to assert political authority and independence in the face of Western pressure?

Some observers have long stressed that the Sudan government has no interest in defying international financial norms. Baghdad is seeking to establish joint banks with other countries and to expand electronic payment systems,

a move that would reduce cash usage and directly target networks that have been attempting to circumvent western sanctions. If Iraqi banks shift to fully digitized banking, financial flows become entirely transparent. Even now, Iraqi banks tightly monitor all financial transactions by individuals and companies, while the US sometimes gains information about transactions, creating the risk of sanctions against those involved. Therefore, whether or not these two groups appear on the committee's list does not change the core reality: Iraq's banking system, tied to the international financial network, will not allow non-state armed groups to conduct high-volume financial transfers. This financial environment has already reassured foreign investors, who have begun forming partnerships in Iraq. Thus, any Iraqi government, given the intense pressure from Western states, cannot simply leave the door open for large-scale financial support to armed groups. One of the main reasons why digital currency systems and informal money-exchange networks are banned in Iraq, with heavy penalties and even criminal sentences, is precisely because they can be used to get around sanctions and to finance armed groups.