

Speech by HRH the Infanta Doña Pilar de Borbón, President of Europa Nostra;
Meeting with Serbian NGOs, National Bank of Serbia, Belgrade, 19 September 2007

Mister Governor of the National Bank of Serbia,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be in Belgrade for this, Europa Nostra's first public event in Serbia. It is also a special occasion for me personally, as it is my first Europa Nostra event in which I am participating as President. Since June, when I was elected to this position at Europa Nostra's Annual Congress in Stockholm and warmly accepted to within the Europa Nostra family, I have enjoyed the pleasure and the privilege of presiding over this pan-European federation for cultural heritage. I indeed look forward to being able to devote my energies to the important cause of safeguarding Europe's cultural heritage treasures.

It is particularly symbolic that this meeting is taking place in the days leading up to the main European event marking this year's edition of the **European Heritage Days**, a remarkable initiative which is jointly promoted by the Council of Europe and the European Commission. Drawing more than 20 million visitors in not less than 49 European countries every year during the month of September, this is one of the most successful European initiatives aimed at raising public awareness about the richness and diversity of Europe's cultural heritage. Europa Nostra is happy to take active part in the coordination at European level of this initiative and is very pleased to see the enthusiasm with which the European Heritage Days are celebrated in our host country, Serbia.

In the context of the build-up towards the 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, it is indeed especially fitting that this year's central European celebration of the European Heritage Days takes place in Serbia. Indeed, Serbia's rich and diverse cultural and natural heritage – multi-secular, multi-ethnic and multi-religious – constitute a most valuable contribution to the richness and diversity of Europe's cultural heritage treasures.

On the occasion of this first public event organised by Europa Nostra in Serbia, I wish to convey Europa Nostra's particular appreciation for the work of the dedicated and efficient organisers of this meeting. Over the past months, the small but very dedicated **Europa Nostra Serbia team** has worked under the effective leadership of its President, **Professor Irina Subotić** and with the valuable assistance of a number of enthusiastic volunteers. The Serbian team has worked closely with **our team at the International Secretariat in The Hague** to ensure the success of this meeting and I wish to thank them for their endeavours. Finally, I wish to thank most sincerely the National Bank of Serbia and its Governor, **Mr Radomir Jelašić**, for having so kindly opened the doors of this historic building for our meeting. We very much appreciate the Bank's commitment not only to preserving this building in good conditions but also for inviting the public to discover its history and architectural beauty and harmony.

We all know that Serbia has gone through traumatic times in the last decades and a number of problems still need to be resolved in your country and the entire region of South-East Europe. The cultural heritage has suffered a lot in this part of Europe, both from deliberate destruction and damage and from neglect or lack of adequate resources and skills. We are therefore aware that your country and your people face today a very challenging task of transforming its cultural heritage in one of its most important assets. In terms of its essential contribution to the sense of pride and sense of belonging to Europe by Serbia's citizens. And also in terms of its significant potential

for promoting the sustainable development of Serbia, in particular through the development of a sustainable cultural tourism.

In challenging times like these, civil society organisations have a special responsibility and an extremely important role to play. They have to become key stakeholders in any future policy and action regarding the safeguard and enhancement of cultural heritage, in this country as it is important for any other European countries. And they have to engage in a fruitful and constructive dialogue with policy and decision makers at all levels of responsibility.

Let me conclude by stressing that Europa Nostra attaches great importance in establishing regular and direct contact with heritage organisations working at national, regional and even local levels. Our member organisations are one of Europa Nostra's greatest assets, as it is from you that we hear directly of problems and concerns, cases of endangered heritage, and learn of innovative approaches and best practices. These exchanges and dialogues are one way for us to keep our ear to the ground, to shape our priorities and action at the European level, and to find out how best to answer your needs.

And now, we look forward to listening to the views of representatives of a selected group of Serbian heritage NGOs who have joined us this afternoon. Let me assure you that Europa Nostra looks very much forward to strengthening its presence in Serbia, as well as in the entire region of South-Eastern Europe, and in engaging in a mutually beneficial cooperation with representatives of heritage bodies active in Serbia. We also hope that this and future dialogue with Europa Nostra and its members will provide you, the heritage professionals and volunteers present here, with valuable insight into the wider European context and dimension of your work.

I wish you all a very fruitful and mutually inspiring exchange!