

Presentation of the European Year of Cultural Heritage
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**Dear Minister Kunst,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

The German National Committee for Monument Preservation (Nationalkomitee für Denkmalschutz, DNK) and the Federal Commissioner for Culture and Media (Bundesbeauftragte für Kultur und Medien, BKM) are launching an initiative: the “European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018”.

This initiative has to be seen in the context of other and similar activities. I want to mention the “Report of the Horizon 2020 Expert Group on Cultural Heritage” of the European Commission in 2015 with the title “Getting Cultural Heritage to Work for Europe”. Under the Belgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the 6th Conference of Ministers responsible for Cultural Heritage published in April 2015 the so-called Namur Declaration: Cultural heritage in the 21st century for living better together, towards a common strategy for Europe. And Europa Nostra during its annual congress in Oslo on 12 June 2015 presented a voluminous study under the title “Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe”.

So, one may conclude that with so many initiatives, everything is at its best in Europe. But is it really? It is not, Europe is in crisis. Since years we have an economic and financial crisis, we are talking about Grexit, others even about Brexit. We have the war in Eastern Ukraine, and the relations between the European Union and Russia are in a deep crisis. And somehow it seems that Europe and the European idea are losing attraction. This growing lethargy for Europe is its greatest danger. We need to work for Europe!

In this situation of crisis, not by chance the role of culture and cultural heritage is being reconsidered. But: Culture and cultural heritage cannot solve the fundamental economic and financial problems of Europe. However, we can only overcome this crisis and future ones, if the European citizens have a certain immunity against anti-European thinking, Europe must be out of question forever! I remember a podium discussion with Felipe Gonzalez a few years ago in Berlin, when he said, Europe did its greatest steps forward always after moments of deep crisis. If this is true, we can await a gigantic step forward after the present crisis.

What means Cultural Heritage?

There is a very good definition of cultural heritage by Europa Nostra: “Cultural heritage consists of the resources inherited from the past in all forms and aspects, tangible, intangible and digital (born digital and digitized), including monuments, sites, landscapes, skills, practices, knowledge and expressions of human creativity, as well as collections conserved and managed by public and private bodies such as museums, libraries and archives. Cultural heritage originates from the interaction between people and places through time and it is constantly evolving. The resources are of great value to society from a cultural,

environmental, social and economic point of view, and thus their sustainable management constitutes a strategic choice for the 21st century”.

Let me add a few personal comments on it. Cultural heritage is visible history, and man cannot exist without history. History, however, has a lot to do with memory and tradition, history is not only the understanding of political, economic, social and cultural processes, but also the knowledge of origin. Already the oldest complex societies and the earliest civilizations created monuments, which they had an important function for society, and monuments always were part of a conscious political strategy, too. Monuments have an important role for the collective memory, which has always been constructed by selected aspects from the past. The memory of the past becomes a social phenomenon, and collective memory is a process of selection, which includes the forgetting as well. Different from that is cultural memory including all kinds of cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, as we heard above.

So, cultural heritage represents a very broad spectrum, but the German initiative highlights the built and archaeological heritage, and for good reasons. Especially this kind of cultural heritage is in danger. It is looting and blasting world heritage sites in Syria and Iraq, but illegal excavations we find all over the world, Europe and Germany included, and the remains of the earliest history of mankind is about to get lost forever.

Why does Europe need to care for its Cultural Heritage?

Cultural heritage is extremely important for Europe today, because it brings multiple benefits for society, environment and economy. The cultural heritage of Europe is the cultural heritage which all Europeans share, it is our shared heritage. Therefore it is good, that the German initiative focuses on this aspect.

First of all, we see its political significance for Europe, because cultural heritage is the visible expression of our common European culture and history, it is the testimony of our roots, which are essential to understand our present, and cultural heritage is a decisive element of our local, regional, national und European identity.

“Unity in diversity”, this is the strong force of European integration. Unity and diversity have never been contradictions, and European cultural heritage has to reflect this unique unity in this rich diversity. In this sense, cultural heritage contributes fundamentally to a sense of European citizenship, to a sense of belonging to. Cultural heritage is a cohesive factor in the on-going process of European integration, because it is uniting past, present and future. It helps to realize that our shared historical experience is not only the memory of murderous European civil wars. Cultural heritage is one of the most dynamic forces to shape Europe and a European consciousness, and this is so important to create more consciousness among the European citizens, fully committed to the European idea. Historical buildings and cultural landscapes are the visible and tangible witnesses that – together with the intangible forms of heritage – reflect a common civilization, which all Europeans share and care for. We have to make use of the political potential of cultural heritage-related activities!

Cultural heritage also contributes to the quality of social life in Europe by improving the character and beauty of our living environment, by providing essential stimuluses to education and lifelong learning, including a better understanding of history and historic surroundings. Cultural heritage creates social cohesion in communities across Europe through cultural and intercultural education and provides a framework for participation and engagement.

But cultural heritage also is an asset for sustainable economic development, because all of its components can generate a wide range of positive economic benefits, creating a wide range of jobs and skill levels from conservation-related construction, repair and maintenance

to small and medium-sized enterprises as well as start-ups, often in the creative industries. Renovation and maintenance represents more than a quarter of the value of Europe's construction industry. And even Europe's intangible cultural heritage has an enormous economic impact: film, theatre, music and dance as well as craftsmanship and cuisine. Tourism is one of the most important and fastest growing sectors in world economy, and Europe is the world's no. 1 tourist destination today, because of its cultural heritage. Therefore, sustainable tourism requires preservation and development of cultural heritage, and intra-European cultural tourism also promotes and strengthens the awareness of Europe's cultural dimension and cohesion.

Cultural heritage is important for the image of a city in the global competition of cities for economic attractiveness (*Standortfaktor*), and it is a key component for investment, for developing cultural creative quarters and for attracting talents. Cultural heritage provides regions and cities with unique identities and narratives, which are the basis for effective marketing strategies to develop cultural tourism and to bring investment. The annual "Day of the open monument" in Germany has millions of visitors, growing tendency, and this is a top position in Europe. Each year more people visit museums than football stadiums. Therefore, the safeguarding and enhancement of cultural heritage has to be among the top priorities and objectives of the European Union, in order to give European civilization a human face!

What has to be done for Promoting European Cultural Heritage?

At Europa Nostra's Annual Congress in Oslo on June 12th of this year, the publication "Cultural Heritage counts for Europe" with strategic recommendations was presented. It was a project by a consortium of six European partners from different countries, and Europa Nostra was acting as project coordinator. The analysis shows that investment in cultural heritage can be seen as "upstream investment" which can deliver significant "downstream benefits". By the way, Europa Nostra prepares the annual European Heritage Congress 2018 in Berlin, and this would be a good opportunity to combine it with the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

But there are many other European initiatives supporting cultural heritage: the European Heritage Days, the EU Prize for Cultural Heritage, the European Heritage Label, the European Digital Library Europeana, and the European cultural heritage benefits from a large range of EU policies, programs and funding

What else can be done? One has to develop mechanisms for a regular dialogue with organized civil society in the field of cultural heritage, because it is crucial to foster the mobilization and engagement of the people and local communities in Europe for all aspects, challenges and potentials of cultural heritage. Further on we have to enhance cultural heritage education through cultural and intercultural education, and the digitization of cultural heritage leads to a real democratization of culture and knowledge. And we have to think how we can promote the synergy between sustainable tourism and cultural heritage. The fight against illicit trafficking of works of art, especially antiques, is extremely important, too. But the most important: We have to change mentality – from the conservation to the transmission of cultural heritage. Europe should, however, not be converted into a theme park, but perhaps transformed into a cultural heritage laboratory.

We have to give special focus on what is uniting and not separating us, for example through cross-border cultural heritage activities. The classical European border regions must be transformed from the cicatrices of history into the welding lines of the future, and already a lot of initiatives are going on in border regions like Euregio Maas-Rhine, Tirol-Trentino or Oder-Neiße etc. Very important are the so-called cultural routes, for example the Via Imperii from Rome to Stettin or the Via Regia from Paris to Nowgorod and Kiev. There are the sizes of the Hansa, uniting the countries around the Baltic Sea, the monuments of the Megalithic Culture from Spain to Scandinavia, there are networks of Jewish and Islamic heritage in Europe and

sites of the European totalitarian regimes in the 20th century. But also the activities and investments of each country contribute enormously to this common goal. In Berlin the Federal Republic of Germany is restoring the Museum Island, UNESCO world heritage site, and together with the Humboldt-Forum in the reconstructed Berlin palace, the historical centre of the German capital will be transformed into a unique place of world culture, which makes understandable European heritage in a global context.

The borders of Europe are floating, and Europe has to react. European culture and European cultural heritage is not limited to the EU's territory, and we should not permit a Europe with dividing lines. It is a challenge for the future to integrate Eastern Europe and Russia at least culturally. We also have to find answers on what is going on along the southern border of Europe in the Mediterranean, because South Europe and North Africa in the sense of culture and history have a lot in common. The Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, SPK) realized a rather successful EU twinning project in Georgia. Twinning projects are helping institutions in possible future member states and neighboring countries of the EU to develop especially administrative and economic structures which may bring them closer to Europe. After hundreds of twinning projects, our engagement in Georgia was the first intent to use twinning in the field of culture, and it was extremely successful. In this sense we should promote other twinning activities in the field of cultural heritage.

Tolerance and respect are fundamental for a peaceful European society integrated in a peaceful world. Europe reflects more and more diverse cultural and religious traditions. This is not a danger for Europe, because our continent through all its history benefitted enormously from immigrations. There is no European history without the history of migrations, we should not forget that.

The European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018

The European Year of Cultural Heritage (ECHY) 2018 can promote all what is important for us. It can enhance the understanding of what is Europe culturally uniting in its vast diversity. Many of the multiple projects are addressing to the younger generation, which extremely important. The ECHY 2018, however, is focusing on the built and archaeological cultural heritage in the light of social change, and this is good. The built heritage is the history which we meet on our everyday walks, and the archaeological heritage brings us back to the roots of European history, showing us the history, which all European have in common. I wish this German initiative all the expected success, Europe needs it.

Thank you very much.