



**European Heritage Awards Ceremony
Teatro de la Zarzuela, Madrid
24 May 2016**

***Speech by Plácido Domingo
President of Europa Nostra***

*Mister Commissioner,
Mister Minister,
Madam President of Hispania Nostra,
Dear Award Winners,
Dear Friends,*

What a joy to stand here tonight at the stage of *Teatro de la Zarzuela*, not as a singer but as the President of Europa Nostra!

For many, the *Teatro de la Zarzuela* is just a beautiful performance venue in a beautiful historic city. For me, it is the voice of my father, the laughter of my mother, and all the music that my parents and I performed here for so many years. So many wonderful memories which form part of my own heritage. I am so happy to share this heritage with all of you tonight.

And since the beautiful Spanish language is also part of my heritage of which I am so proud, I hope you will allow me to continue in my mother tongue.

Tonight, the primary reason for our celebration are, of course, our Award winners. I wish to congratulate them all! But I find it important to address also several other issues worthy of celebration.

It is an honour for me to host, together with **Commissioner Navracsics**, our European Heritage Awards Ceremony in Madrid, in the year when **Spain celebrates the 30th anniversary of its accession to the European Union**. Here in Spain, this is therefore a year to celebrate Europe!

It is also **30 years ago** that the **Council of Europe** adopted its very first Convention dedicated to Heritage: **the European Convention on the Protection of the Architectural Heritage** which was drafted and signed here in Spain, in **Granada**! Therefore, tonight we also celebrate Europe's long-commitment to cultural heritage, which has benefitted from strong contribution from Spain.

Mr Minister, Europa Nostra and I are confident that your country - **my country** - will continue to play such a positive role also in the future. It is so important that the new government of Spain fully **recognizes the huge value of the cultural and human capital** which is embedded in the very rich heritage of Spain. We encourage them to adopt policies which will allow this formidable capital to flourish!

As we have just heard from **Araceli Pereda**, we also **celebrate** tonight the **40th anniversary of Hispania Nostra**. Your organisation is the oldest daughter of Europa Nostra and we are very proud of your important work. Thank you for what you are doing for our shared heritage, with so many dedicated volunteers! And thank you for hosting the entire Europa Nostra Congress in Madrid!

This Congress is the perfect occasion to **celebrate** the very recent proposal made by the European Commission to designate **2018** as the **European Year of Cultural Heritage!** Europa Nostra and so many other organisations campaigned passionately in support of this great initiative. Thank you Commissioner Navracsics for this important victory!

I can guarantee that Europa Nostra, all our members and partners, with all our award winners, will give you our full support! Last week in Brussels I passed the same message also to **Jean-Claude Juncker**, President of the European Commission. We agreed that culture and cultural heritage are strong positive forces for change and that the **Year should be used as a catalyst for a true European Renaissance.**

At the moment when too many forces seek to divide Europe and to rebuild barriers in Europe, we have to present our **cultural heritage as a strong cohesive force for Europe and its citizens**. Though diverse, we are a big family, with a formidable history and an amazing heritage. We should invest much more effort in educating - young and old alike - about the importance of those assets. It reminds us all why we are together in this great European adventure, and how we managed to ensure peace and prosperity in Europe through a shared commitment.

I very much hope that the European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018 will become a real **firework of positive and creative energy** generated by various forms of social participation, both at local and European levels.

- Let us connect across Europe many innovative community projects which aim to regenerate our cities and countryside through respectful conservation and re-use of heritage.
- Let us connect Europe's performing arts, festivals, museums and heritage sites to demonstrate Europe's formidable soft power which is embedded in our culture.
- Let us engage visionary businesses, entrepreneurs and Maecenas.
- Let us integrate our old traditions into the new ideas of young Europeans.
- Let us, of course, benefit from the creative power of civil society organisations to bring communities together.
- Last but not least, let us especially invite all the winners of our European Heritage Awards to contribute to this Year; the winners that we have honoured tonight, but also all the other ones that we have selected over the last decades. Let them be our guide and our inspiration!

However, the European Year of Cultural Heritage should not be an isolated occasion. Let it be the beginning of a renewed commitment by the European Institutions and European citizens to **care** for our heritage, and **share** it both within and outside of Europe.

I am convinced that this will be the best contribution we can make to the much needed revival of our shared European project!