

**Opening of the photo exhibition
EU Prize for cultural heritage/ Europa Nostra awards**

**Berlaymont
5 December 2013 at 17:30**

Welcome Speech

(550 words)

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening and thank you for joining us for the opening of this exhibition. Let me extend a special welcome to Maestro Plácido Domingo, who is honouring us with his presence today.

If you look around, you will see some of the most brilliant examples of how European cultural heritage may be preserved, researched, and made available to local communities and visitors.

The exhibition brings together some of the outstanding projects which were awarded the EU Prize for cultural heritage/Europa Nostra awards since the Prize's inception in 2002.

The exhibition is a small tribute to Europe's heritage in all its diverse aspects.

The European Commission fully stands by the commitment conferred to it by the EU Treaties that is to safeguard and promote Europe's cultural heritage. We work together with Member States and the civil society to fulfil this commitment.

For the past decade or so, we have been privileged to count Europa Nostra among our partners, not least as organiser of the EU Prize for cultural heritage/Europa Nostra awards.

This exhibition is proof of this partnership and a tribute to our shared commitment to safeguarding European heritage.

This year, Europa Nostra celebrates fifty years of activity – fifty years tirelessly devoted to the preservation and promotion of Europe's cultural heritage. What a better way to celebrate this by bringing more cultural heritage to the Berlaymont – where the heart of the European Commission beats in Brussels.

In fact, this small exhibition is a veritable "*tour de force*": the photos on display illustrate 33 projects from as many European countries, all of which have won the Prize since 2002.

It has not been easy to choose among over three hundred winning entries in the Prize's history. But the result is a fantastic journey, both in time - from stone-age to industrial heritage - and in space - from Sweden to Cyprus and from Portugal to Romania.

Through these examples we want to celebrate all the winners, who each in their respective area – conservation, research, education or public awareness – contribute to Europe's fame as the land of art and culture and the cradle of civilisation.

I would like to take this occasion to thank all those active in the area of cultural heritage – experts and citizens alike - for their work and dedication. They share with us their vision of Europe as a continent that treasures its past and looks to the future with hope.

Cultural heritage is among the strongest assets for Europe. This reservoir of growth and social cohesion is not explored in an optimal way. We must take a careful look at this potential and address the challenges our cultural heritage is facing in terms of environmental risks, skills adaptation and the digital revolution.

This is why we need to do more to address heritage in a holistic manner. Before the end of my mandate, I intend to propose a new initiative on cultural heritage.

It is an ambition that we in Brussels cannot fulfil without your continued commitment, inspiration and energy. There is much work to be done, but I am confident that I can count on you and on other heritage stakeholders to work with us to safeguard Europe's cultural heritage and keep it alive for future generations.

Thank you for your attention.