

INTRODUCTORY MESSAGE OF WELCOME TO THE CEREMONY OF THE
EUROPEAN UNION PRIZES FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE/EUROPA NOSTRA AWARDS
AT THE ODEION OF HERODES ATTICOS

Athens, 16th June 2013

Costa Carras, Vice President, Europa Nosta

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The distinguished British philosopher Bernard Williams stated “The legacy of Greece to Western philosophy is Western philosophy” [1]. Similarly we could say “The legacy of Greece to Europe is Europe”. It is not just the word, and certainly not just the myth, it is chiefly the concept of constitutional order and of the rule of humanly determined law as characterising Greek city-states, in opposition to monarchical absolutism, which Herodotos, the father of European history, bequeathed to subsequent generations as a distinguishing mark of the societies he admired.

There has been a great deal of tyranny in European history, both externally and internally. Even the maintenance of the most fundamental European achievement, constitutional order under humanly determined law, has never been secure, nor is it secure today. Furthermore, just as the geographical limits of Europe have shifted over the centuries, so too has its cultural content.

Yet Herodotos’ foundation story for Europe remains true. It was on the plain of Marathon that a democratic city-state first repelled the military might of an absolutist despotism. The unparalleled harmony of the buildings on the Acropolis remind us today this was not just an example of temporary military superiority but of existential leadership that has inspired countless generations all over the world. Here then are Europe’s still living roots, respect for which has brought Europa Nostra to Athens for its 50th Anniversary.

Europe, welcome home!

Tonight we honour excellence in conservation and dedicated service. In the second half of this ceremony we shall explore the relationship between humankind and nature, which in our days has become critical. From the writings and songs of the Greek cultural tradition, in all its diversity over 27 centuries from Homer’s Odysseus to Odysseas Elytis, we shall explore how harmony needs to be, can be and should be found in the relationship between human beings and the natural world around us.

[1] Writing in the collective OP volume entitled “The Legacy of Greece: A New Appraisal” (Oxford 1981

Excellencies!

Friends!

In 1974, the Acropolis monuments lay in neglect. Today, that unfavourable image of Greece has been gradually transformed into a general acknowledgement of a major conservation achievement. Doubtless, if we can obtain similar changes in other areas of national life, the country's prestige will enjoy a general recovery.

Achieving this goal requires commitment to the primordial Greek pursuit of excellence. This in turn implies disdain for that short-sighted, expansionist greed which, as has already occurred in so many cities, villages, and particularly islands, under the pretext of upgrading or developing, has in fact degraded valuable elements of Greek nature and culture.

In this respect, the two most recent generations of Greeks have proven ourselves inferior both to our ancestral traditions and the challenges ahead, let alone the uniqueness of Greece's cultural heritage and natural environment. Our attitude, an attitude of aggressive exploitation, represents a sin in relation to God and a failure in relation to humankind. We have ignored the fact that in the unsparing struggle for economic survival, the beauties of our nature together with the breadth and depth of our cultural heritage represent our chief comparative advantages.

May tonight's recognition by Europe as a whole of a great national accomplishment on the Acropolis help us realise the need to persevere on the path of virtue and sustainability in the future. This is the way to achieve a positive economic outcome in the long term. This is the way to rescue the best from the worst in our own nature. This is the way to regain our self-awareness, self-confidence and self-respect, through academic excellence, dedication to art and effective care for our cities and villages, for the mountains, the seas, and the islands of Greece, elements indispensable if we wish to secure a future worthy of our past.