

European Heritage Awards Ceremony 2013
Odeion of Herodes Atticus, Athens
16 June 2013

Closing Speech by Plácido Domingo, President of Europa Nostra

*Mr President of the Hellenic Republic,
Dear Friends,*

The **Odeion of Herodes Atticus** is one of the most **wondrous** stages for any performing artist and for any audience. What a **deep emotion** to be back tonight to Athens. To stand here **as President** of Europa Nostra facing the Acropolis, with its Propyléa whose exemplary restoration has just been crowned with our Public Choice Award!

Let me start by congratulating all our award winners:

Ladies and gentlemen...**This is *your* moment!**

The years of hard work have paid off. **This is *the* moment** the whole of Europe says '**thank you**' for your efforts. You have proven, once again, that even in the hardest economic circumstances, cultural heritage projects can **inspire talents** and **rally support** from public and private sources, and can become a “**success story**”.

Madam Commissioner, Dear Androulla,

We can truly be proud of the extraordinary projects and people that we have honoured here tonight. They prove that Cultural Heritage belongs at the very heart of the **New Narrative for Europe**, the new initiative that President Barroso and you have recently launched. The **New Narrative for Europe** which seeks to link Europe's past with Europe's future...to bring Europe's citizens closer to Europe's policies and institutions. **You can count on us to actively contribute to this vital initiative.**

Citizens of Athens, Citizens of Europe, this is the moment to start a new **renaissance** for Europe's cultural heritage. Our cultural heritage which is a powerful and sustainable way out of difficult times. This is as true for Greece, as it is for any other country of Europe. **Our Culture is what makes Europe - Europe.**

Therefore, **this is the moment** for a **New Deal for Culture in Europe.** For full recognition that culture is

- our greatest asset,
- our untapped reserve,
- our true gold mine.

Citizens of Athens, Citizens of Europe, Europa Nostra will be **Your Voice**. It is on **your** behalf that we shall work towards putting cultural heritage on everybody's agenda.

For example, with our new flagship programme “**The 7 Most Endangered**”, developed together with the **European Investment Bank Institute**, we will do our utmost to save some of Europe's most valuable and most threatened monuments and sites:

- From another Roman theater, located in neighbouring **Albania...** to the helpless historic buildings which are taken hostage in the Buffer zone of the last divided city in Europe – **Nicosia in Cyprus...**
- From the neglected mountain fortifications of **Vauban** facing the Alps in **France...** to the **amazing Renaissance monastery** severely damaged by a heavy earthquake, which is located near **Mantova** – an Italian city close to my heart, since this is the city of **Rigoletto...**
- From another amazing but abandoned monastery located in **the Portuguese city of Setubal**, which used to be a majestic but silent witness of some important pages of European history... to the rich cultural landscape of **Rosia Montana** in Transylvania in **Romania** which is threatened by a proposed open cast gold mining project...
- From the deserted Armenian Church in the city of Mardin in **Turkey** to many, many more heritage sites which call for European solidarity and joint action, like the **estate of Tatoi**, located not far from Athens.

Many members of the large **Europa Nostra family** are here tonight, many are from Greece but also many came from all parts of Europe. We are all here gathered under the Acropolis to celebrate our 50th anniversary by **celebrating the spirit and the power of European solidarity and cooperation in the field of culture.**

The Europa Nostra family is full of extraordinary women and men who are convinced that our Culture is indeed what makes Europe – Our Europe. They all deserve praise but tonight I wish to pay special tribute to one Greek member of our family. That person has made a unique contribution to the promotion of the cause of heritage and environment conservation in Europe. I am, of course, referring to **Costa Carras.**

Europa Nostra has therefore decided to grant to Costa Carras the **highest decoration** of our organisation – **the Europa Nostra Medal of Honour.**

Let me share with you the citation engraved on this Medal:

“For his visionary and inspiring leadership and his generous voluntary dedication, for his boundless energy and tireless efforts with which he made a unique contribution- over a period of four decades - to Europa Nostra's mission and has enhanced its continuous growth and development”

It is now my great pleasure **to present this well deserved Medal of Honour to a true Hero** of Europe’s Heritage coming from Greece

Mr Carras, this is now *your* moment!

Dear Friends,

This is **our** history. This is **our** future. This is **our** moment.

Imagine a Europe in which our Culture and our Heritage is a source of prosperity for all Europeans, a source of our pride!

Imagine a Europe in which our Culture is a key for peace and understanding among Europeans, and also between Europe and the rest of the world!

Imagine a Europe which invests in our Culture, our Heritage, our Environment and our Youth with **confidence** and with **creativity**!

Imagine a Europe which overcomes its current challenges and stays united through a true renaissance of our shared culture!

You may say that I am a dreamer.....but I know that tonight, at the Herodion, under the Acropolis, I am certainly not the only one!!!

AFTER THE PROBABLE APPLAUSE

Ladies and gentleman, for the closing song of the first part of our ceremony, it is my great pleasure to welcome my friend and fellow UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, a great tenor of today who comes from Greece, MARIO FRANGOULIS!