

## **INTERVIEW WITH DENIS DE KERGORLAY, EXECUTIVE PRESIDENT OF EUROPA NOSTRA**

### **EUROPE'S CULTURAL HERITAGE IS OUR GOLD MINE**

***This year, Europa Nostra is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Congratulations. Can you tell us briefly what is the “raison d’être” of Europa Nostra?***

Europa Nostra has become the Voice of Cultural Heritage in Europe. Back in 1963, a number of heritage associations led by Italia Nostra, decided to set up a European federation of non-governmental organisations dedicated to safeguarding Europe's cultural and natural heritage. 50 years later, our pan-European network includes around 250 member organisations with a combined membership of more than 5 million people in 50 countries, not only in Europe but also beyond. Today we see the existence of a European civil society movement committed to cultural heritage. We are a truly bottom-up organisation, coming from the needs of ordinary people - both professionals and volunteers - to join forces and get involved in something that is vital to all of us, safeguarding Europe's cultural heritage.

Many of our members and partners will come together in mid-June in Athens for our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary Congress. On this occasion we will send forceful messages to European decision-makers in defence of Europe's cultural heritage which is a key resource for Europe today.

***What are the main activities of Europa Nostra?***

A: Europa Nostra is well known for its flagship programme - the “European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage/Europa Nostra Awards”. By giving awards for excellence, we celebrate every year the best heritage achievements in Europe. This year's laureates will be honoured at a high-profile ceremony to be held on 16th June at the foot of the Acropolis in Athens. We also raise our voice when Europe's cultural heritage is in danger. And as our President is the famous opera singer Plácido Domingo, you will understand that we have quite a strong voice...

Europa Nostra's other key task is to organize a “heritage lobby” in Brussels and in Strasbourg. We seek to influence European debate on policies or funding streams which have an impact, direct or indirect, on heritage in order to ensure the highest possible degree of protection for our heritage.

***Does the EU already have a policy on cultural heritage?***

As part of the latest reform of the EU Treaty, The Lisbon Treaty introduced article 3.3. which sets as one of the aims of the European Union that: “[The Union] shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced”. This is a very positive development on which we now have to build. Europa Nostra has an important task working together with EU Institutions and encouraging them to develop a true EU strategy for cultural heritage, in line with article 3.3. of the Lisbon Treaty.

We are therefore extremely honoured and pleased that President Barroso has invited Europa Nostra to take part in the Cultural Committee which he recently set up to prepare a European public debate to formulate a “ New Narrative on Europe” incorporating a strong cultural and heritage dimension. The aim of this important initiative is to engage Europe's cultural and creative sectors in defining a renewed vision and identity for the “European project”, reflecting on its cultural values and unity. The launch event will take place on 23 April in Brussels and the first “General Assembly of Culture and Thinking on Europe” will take place on 11 July in Warsaw.

***Do you have members and have you given awards in Romania?***

We are very pleased that among our members, we also have a number of heritage organisations from Romania, such as Pro Patrimonio (The National Trust for Romania) and The Transylvania Trust. We have Romanian members in our Council, our Scientific Council and also in the Heritage Awards Jury. Over the years, a number of Awards have been given to outstanding achievements in Romania. Personally, I have an extremely fond memory of my visit to Romania back in 2004, to present our award to your eminent conservation architect, Calin Hoinarescu. And it is thanks to architect Hoinarescu that I made one of my most amazing heritage discoveries - the spiritual mausoleum built by her father for the young poet Julia Hasdeu, the first Romanian young lady to study at the Sorbonne in Paris and who was a great admirer of Victor Hugo. Most recently, our Grand Prix in category "dedicated service" was given to Mrs Paraskeva Kovacs for her voluntary commitment to saving some of the most original vernacular heritage in Transylvania, and an Award in category conservation was given to the outstanding restoration of the Monastery of Golia in Iasi. This all shows that a heritage movement is gaining strength in Romania. Your country has a huge wealth of cultural and natural heritage and this brings great responsibility to ensure that this heritage is properly cared for.

***In January this year, you also launched a new programme "The 7 Most Endangered" .***

Yes, we are very proud to have started our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year with the launch of a brand new programme: "The 7 Most Endangered" with the European Investment Bank as a founding partner. During our Congress in Athens, we will announce the very first list of "7 Most Endangered sites" selected on the basis of nominations to be submitted by our member organisations before 15th March. Once the list is published, we will organise visits to the selected sites, together with experts chosen by the European Investment Bank, with the aim of helping local stakeholders to prepare viable and sustainable rescue plans. Our intention is to raise public awareness and mobilise public and private partners, not only at local, but also at national and European level, to do everything possible to save those sites. It is, of course, very possible that one or more endangered sites from Romania will be nominated for our new List.

***Speaking about endangered heritage, Europa Nostra is of course familiar with the on-going debate on the future of the Rosia Montana area, with its remarkable heritage, both architectural and archaeological and also natural. Can you tell us more about the position of your organisation concerning Rosia Montana?***

Europa Nostra has for a long while been closely following discussions concerning the proposed open-cast gold mining project in Rosia Montana and its impact on the cultural heritage and environment of the entire area. Over the years, we have consistently raised our voice to stress the importance of this heritage, not only for Romania, but also for Europe and even the world. We have also expressed our concern about the inevitable and irreversible damage which the gold mine project – if approved – would cause to this heritage. Our latest letter to your Prime Minister dates back to July of last year.

***Did you have the chance to speak to the representatives of the Canadian-based company "Gabriel Resources"?***

Yes, we did. We felt that this was part of our "due diligence". I have thus met with the representatives of the company and also with French, English and Romanian archaeologists who act as counsellors for the company. Their key arguments can be summarized as follows:

- 1) a country such as Romania with its poor state of the economy cannot afford not to take advantage of its mining resources;

- 2) the Rosia Montana region has always been a mining area and the solution proposed by the company is in continuity with the history of the region;
- 3) as a compensation, the company is ready to commit a significant sum of money for the preservation of a certain part of cultural heritage in the area;
- 4) if Romania rejects the offer made by the company, the invaluable cultural and especially archaeological heritage in the area will be lost forever, due to the lack of necessary resources.

My interlocutors appeared to me as being sincere and competent and I do not wish to question their views. But in my capacity as the Executive President of Europa Nostra, it is my duty to stimulate wide thinking and investigation with the aim of finding a solution that would be the most favourable for the safeguarding of the exceptional cultural and natural treasures located in the area of Rosia Montana. As a result of this process of thinking and investigation, we have some questions and also some recommendations which I would like to share with you.

### ***What are your questions?***

It is certainly Romania's right to take advantage of its still considerable mining resources. But the question is how and when. Even if the deal proposed by "Gabriel Resources" may seem – and possibly be – attractive, the "brutality" of the operation surely causes a problem. In this case, we cannot speak about "continuity" with gallery mining operations which have been going on for over 2000 years but still leaving to this day resources of precious metals so significant that the Rosia Montana area is considered to be one of the most important deposits in Europe. As you know, the project proposed by "Gabriel Resources" aims to extract the totality of the remaining gold resources in only 16 years. Such a project can only be realised with open cast mining with the use of cyanide – a technology which has not been applied in past.

There can be no doubt that such methods of extraction which are efficient but also brutal would lead to irreversible damage to the cultural and natural heritage of the entire region. And the proposed creation of a museum displaying some artefacts related to the mining activity of the past, can hardly be accepted as a fair compensation for the irreversible loss of the existing rich heritage, both cultural and natural.

### ***Is an alternative solution feasible?***

If we are not convinced that the project proposed by "Gabriel Resource" is the only solution, we need to examine carefully the feasibility of an alternative development.

First of all, I wish to stress that the search for an alternative solution forms part of a wider thinking in today's world. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we ceased to reason in the same way as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and even during the major part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (up until the 70s), when the natural resources of our planet were considered as being unlimited and we could tap into them as from a bottomless well. Today, there is a growing awareness that the resources of the planet are not unlimited, that we must make sustainable use of them, and that the era of "wastage" and of endless exploitation has come to an end.

It is therefore legitimate to question whether it is appropriate for a country like Romania to "sell off" in less than 20 years her formidable gold deposits, located under another gold mine - the cultural and natural heritage resources of the area of Rosia Montana. By resisting the "sirens" of "Gabriel Resources", Romania can be sure of the following: it might miss an opportunity for short-term economic growth, but it would preserve the resources of both gold mines: the gold resources that have not yet been extracted, and the other one consisting of the cultural and natural heritage.

Let us dream for a while: is it inconceivable to believe that it would be possible in the future to embark upon an “ecological” exploitation of the gold resources without the proposed open-cast mining method with the use of cyanide, but with another type of new technology that would resume the tradition of gallery mining? Technology developments have already shown us numerous reversals of situations. I therefore do not think that an ecological evolution of the gold extraction technology is inconceivable.

Secondly, let us not forget that there is in Europe another rapidly growing market – that of cultural tourism. Countries like France or Italy, so rich in cultural and natural heritage, have proven that tourism related to cultural heritage creates growth and prosperity in the regions or cities concerned. Why can't we imagine that Romania, with its natural and cultural heritage sites still not sufficiently exploited in terms of tourism, can follow the example of others, and benefit from gains made by investing in its own cultural and natural treasures? It is precisely these arguments that are advanced by our member organisations in Romania, and especially by Pro Patrimonio and the Transylvania Trust.

***Based on the above thoughts, what are Europa Nostra's recommendations?***

Europa Nostra follows with great interest all the efforts developed by our member organisations in Romania in order to formulate an “environmentally friendly alternative solution” based on sustainable preservation of the cultural and natural heritage.

The following considerations are vital for the implementation of such a solution:

a) The possible inscription of the whole region as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. This is a major issue, and the process has to be initiated by the Romanian authorities (as we have already suggested in our letters to the government).

b) In the same spirit we urge Romanian authorities to ensure that national legislation on cultural heritage is fully respected. If important elements of your cultural heritage, such as Mount Carnic, are protected by national law, the government should not allow, without wide-spread consultation of all parties concerned, their delisting and the reduction of the level of protection this would bring.

c) The commitment of the European Union to financially help Romania to realize a long term project of preservation and development of the whole area. Since it seems that Romania at present does not have enough resources for such an investment, a credible alternative to the project promoted by “Gabriel Resources” can only be implemented through a concerted plan of action between the European Institutions and the Romanian Government. Resources have to be found within the EU structural funds and the European Investment Bank to prepare an urgent plan of intervention to preserve the heritage already at threat of physical destruction; and to implement a medium and long term development project of preservation of the whole area based on cultural and ecological tourism which, as already mentioned, is one of the fastest growing markets of Europe today.

We believe that the European Union should help Romania opt for such development, in line with the EU's own 2020 Agenda for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth and also with its important Sustainability Agenda. Such development would also contribute to the implementation of the “Creative Europe” Agenda recently proposed by EU Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou, with the support of President Barroso, as a way of giving further impetus to the cultural and creative sectors in Europe.

If the EU wishes to translate its good intentions into concrete action, it seems to me that Rosia Montana is a perfect case study, a true test of the EU's determination to promote sustainable development as opposed to purely short term strategies. In the case of Rosia Montana, I do not intend to set the good against the bad; I rather wish to favour long-term visions and effective strategies rather than just following the logic of short term profit.

***Why does Europa Nostra think that everything must be done to preserve the cultural and natural heritage in Rosia Montana (as in the rest of Europe)?***

There is ample evidence that cultural heritage has multiple benefits for our society and for our economy. These multiple benefits have been recognized by the European Framework Convention on the Value of Heritage for the Society - the so called Faro Convention - which was adopted by the Council of Europe back in 2004. A number of European countries, including Romania, have signed and ratified this Convention. However, we believe that more should be done - both at national and at European level - to collect compelling evidence, in quantitative and in qualitative terms, about the value of our cultural heritage. Europa Nostra and other European and international heritage organisations coming together in an informal lobbying platform called "European Heritage Alliance 3.3." (referring to that article in the Lisbon Treaty) are determined to work, individually and collectively, gathering this important evidence and making it available to our decision-makers.

In the meantime, there is no doubt that cultural heritage is a key resource for Europe. To quote our President, Maestro Plácido Domingo "our cultural heritage is our gold mine. It is Europe's bread and butter as much as it is Europe's heart and soul". But if cultural heritage is a key resource for Europe, this resource remains fragile and non-renewable. We therefore need to take particularly good care of it in order to ensure its sustainable and viable future.