



## CULTURAL DIPLOMACY: FOSTERING INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL DIALOGUE, DIVERSITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Conference organised by the Maltese Presidency of the European Union  
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*Speech by Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailović,  
Secretary General of Europa Nostra*

*Excellencies,  
Dear Colleagues and Friends,*

Europa Nostra is most grateful for the organisation of this important conference which seeks to contribute to a stronger “**International cultural engagement**” – to quote Cssi Navracsics – of the European Union.

Today, more than ever, the world and Europe needs **enlightened cultural leadership**. Malta with its unique Mediterranean light is a perfect place to celebrate it, to embrace it and to promote it inside and outside Europe.

Europa Nostra and I are grateful for the opportunity to address this distinguished conference as “The Voice of Cultural Heritage in Europe”, and this alongside such eminent speakers as **Dr Mechtild Rossler**, representing a key intergovernmental institution promoting culture and heritage across the Globe, and **Professor Henry Frendo**, representing the academic world. It is therefore my honour to contribute to our vital discussion from the point of view of “heritage activists” organised at various levels, and in various forms, of civil society in Europe.

So many organisations, communities, citizens are **caring** for our heritage, and **fighting** for our heritage here in Malta, across Our Europe and across the continents. **Why?** Because cultural heritage has value – **a multiple value** – for our life – as demonstrated by Mechtild Rossler. And because cultural heritage is key to our identity – **our multiple identity** – as will hopefully seek to demonstrate Professor Frendo. As a contribution to the current mobilisation of many stakeholders – public and private - in favour of a true EU strategy of international cultural relations, I wish to present to you Europa Nostra as an illustration of “**cultural diplomacy in action for heritage**”.

## **Our heritage is indeed a priceless but very fragile resource.**

Our heritage is facing many threats, caused by human actions as we have been witnessing almost real time via social media or by forces of nature, as we have just witnessed here in Malta with a sad loss of the Azure Window whose collapse was caused by the tempest of the day after yesterday. We must therefore “**#unite4heritage**”, as we were invited by UNESCO and its DG Irina Bokova, a cultural (heritage) diplomacy campaign “par excellence”. Europa Nostra gladly endorsed this campaign as demonstrated on my opening slide with a picture taken at our European Heritage Awards Ceremony held in June 2015 at the iconic Town Hall of Oslo, the place which is known for the annual Nobel Peace Prize ceremony. *You might have recognized Csr Navracsics in the first row, sitting next to the Crown Prince of Norway!*

The very birth of Europa Nostra has been an act of “cultural diplomacy”. 53 years ago, back in 1963, - only 5 years after the signature of the Treaty of Rome - , the ideals of Europe and of European cooperation were very fashionable! Not only among politicians and governments but also among individuals and various forms of associations! And our birth certificate was signed...where else than in Paris, the seat of UNESCO, and this at the Paris office of the Council of Europe’s office.

Today, our headquarters are located in **The Hague**, the International City of Peace and Justice and we, of course, have a Liaison office in **Brussels**. Since my arrival in Malta, I am increasingly thinking that we should soon open an outpost in the South of Europe as well!

Europa Nostra has grown into an impressive network of organisations and individuals, professionals and volunteers, who have a passion for heritage and who are prepared to raise their voice to preserve it and transmit it to future generations.

More than 50 years later, we have built a structured dialogue with 3 key international institutions: UNESCO, Council of Europe and finally the European Union.

We have become THE Voice and we are proud and grateful to have Maestro Placido Domingo as our President, our Voice! As for any diplomacy, including cultural diplomacy, and people2people diplomacy, we need inspiring and skilled AMBASSADORS! Some are world famous, as our President, many others are less famous but equally important due to their engagement, often voluntary engagement, for the cause of heritage at all levels of its governance.

Since we are in Malta let me pay tribute to generous, dedicated and enlightened volunteers united under the banner of “Din l’ Art Helwa”, the National Trust for Malta, which represents Europa Nostra in this country. Founded by **Judge Maurice Carruana Curran**, who was also one of the founding fathers of Europa Nostra, Din l’Art Helwa continues to care and fight for heritage in Malta, with an impressive dedication and knowledge and with a remarkable courage. Let me pay special tribute to my dear friend **Simone Mizzi**, daughter of Judge Carruana Curran and Board member of Europa Nostra, who together with so many other volunteers in Malta, some of which are with us today, carry high up the flag of heritage not only in Malta but in Europe and beyond.

We are, of course, delighted to see that the EU's strategy in the making rightly stresses the vital role of civil society actors. Though Europa Nostra's action focuses on Europe – but not the Europe of 28 or 27, rather the Grande Europe which includes the Balkans, Russia and Turkey – our network stands at the entire disposal of EU Institutions to reflect together on the best way in which Europe's experience and expertise in the cultural field could be shared with other parts of the world.

Not only **our network** is at your disposal...also **our key instruments** are at your disposal.

Above all **our Awards scheme** which we have organised since 1978 – so next year 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary! Since 2002, we organise it in partnership with the European Commission, and it is today known as “The Nobel Prize for Cultural Heritage in Europe”. But why could we not dream about an extension of our awards to cover the entire world?

Many of you are familiar with our Awards Scheme, but let me share with you some award winners which are, in my view, particularly relevant for the topic of our conference since they illustrate the vital role which cultural heritage can play to promote inter-cultural dialogue, especially in post-conflict areas where we need to re-build trust and respect between various communities affected by the conflict.

Let me move to the part of Europe I come from: the countries of former Yugoslavia. This year we have given one of our 7 Grand Prix to the employees and activists of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo. The award was an act of cultural diplomacy and the local award ceremony is also an act of diplomacy with a memorable concert organised by Maestro Jordi Savall and his Balkan musical ensemble at the Museum in Sarajevo, and also at the reconstructed Town Hall of Sarajevo. Perfect example of tangible and intangible heritage supporting each other and jointly seeking to help re-build the broken connections between the hearts and minds of people in Bosnia and Herzegovina!

At a time when deplorable acts of deliberate destruction of heritage are happening in Middle East in Africa, we must remember that only 25 years ago such deplorable acts were happening also here in Europe...

the World Heritage City of Dubrovnik....

the Town Hall and the Library of Sarajevo...

the world-famous Old Bridge of Mostar...

the religious sites – both Islamic and Serbian Orthodox – in Kosovo....

**So many cultural tragedies which have been added to so many human tragedies!**

In the last 25 years, UNESCO and the European Union have both contributed to the post-conflict revitalization of the wounded communities through culture and cultural heritage. But much more still needs to be done, especially today when tensions are rising again in the wider region of the Western Balkans and South-East Europe as a whole, as confirmed by HP/VP Mogherini following her very recent tour of the Western Balkans.

Back in 2006, Europa Nostra has embarked upon a unique exercise of cultural diplomacy in reaction to the situation in Kosovo. We have organized a “people 2 people” off-gathering at the historic castle in Normandy owned by our Executive President, Denis de Kergorlay. The “change of climate” in interpersonal relations which this gathering had created was a clear

proof of the added value of civil society organisations in situations of political conflict and tensions such as Kosovo. In the future, the Europa Nostra “human/humanist framework” could be used for similar cultural diplomacy operations, in support of cultural activities undertaken by institutional players, nationally or internationally.

From **People2People Diplomacy** modestly organised by Europa Nostra, to **State2State**, and **Money2Money** Diplomacy – International Conference organised recently in Abu Dhabi upon the joint initiative of the President of France and the Sheik of Abu Dhabi. Such initiatives should be applauded and it is Europa Nostra’s strong recommendation to the European Union to discuss ways of contributing in the best way to the on-going mobilisation for cultural heritage at global level. This is a perfect example of key areas of future EU external action which should be developed not only in relation to its “strategic partner countries”, but also to its strategic partner international organisations.

We have spoken a lot about heritage endangered by political and armed conflicts. However, heritage is often threatened also in times of peace.

Please allow me to mention again the case of Dubrovnik, and also the case of Venice and its lagoon.

In Malta, during the last 15 years, since its accession to the EU, superb heritage-led regeneration projects were implemented, often with the help of EU structural funds. Malta was in many ways a success story, as demonstrated by the award given to the Valletta Waterfront.

**Report! Like missionaries we are spreading it across Europe, even at the Dečani Monastery (World Heritage in Danger!) in Kosovo during my meeting last year with Father Sava, Abbot of this Monastery.**

**Holistic approach** to identifying and measuring the impact of cultural heritage for economy, society, culture and environment – at the heart of the flower – **sustainable development!**

In the future, the EU should seek to become a champion of sustainability across the Globe while putting due emphasis on the cultural component of sustainability! This should be reflected in any future dialogue or cooperation with UN Institutions as part of the implementation of the SDGs!

BUT, If EU does not raise the profile of cultural heritage as a resource for sustainable development among its Member States, it will be difficult to spread this message elsewhere in the world. **LEADING BY EXAMPLE!**

**European Year of Cultural Heritage** – Special thanks to Csir Navracsics who has managed to convince President Juncker, and also to all Member States who have supported this initiative, and finally special tribute to the Maltese Presidency for helping to engineer an agreement between all EU Institutions.

**This Year gives us all a historic opportunity!**

**60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty of Rome** – Europe is, above all, a **peace project**. It is also a **cultural project**. Can we still hope that this will be recognised by the Rome Declaration? It is never too later to fill the gap.

This would be of importance for the **credibility** of the future strategy of EU international cultural engagement.

**INVITATION TO YOU ALL! European Heritage Summit** – we wish to involve Cultural Diplomacy Platform & UNESCO as partners in Berlin!

Let us seize this opportunity to bring all those players – public and private – which work for cultural heritage through various policies of the European Union, including the EU enlargement policy, EU neighbourhood policy and EU external relations policy!

Europa Nostra stands ready to further discuss the best ways to organize the cultural heritage strand of EU's future strategy of "international cultural engagement".