

**Europa Nostra Conference on Cultural Heritage - European Policy
Debate
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***Speech by Themis Christophidou, Director General of DG
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Madame la Présidente de la Région Île-de-France,

Monsieur le Président du Comité économique et social,

Chère Sneška,

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Je souhaite tout d'abord vous remercier chaleureusement de nous accueillir dans cet endroit merveilleux qu'est le Collège des Bernardins - un lieu de connaissance, de partage et de patrimoine partagé.

L'ordre des Cisterciens a marqué l'Europe de son empreinte, du Portugal à la Pologne et à la Suède. Vous n'auriez pas pu choisir un lieu plus symbolique pour notre réflexion d'aujourd'hui. J'ajouterais que c'est non seulement le patrimoine culturel, mais aussi les héritages religieux et humanistes de l'Europe, symbolisé par ce magnifique collège des Bernardins, qui sont une source d'inspiration pour la construction européenne, comme nous le rappelle le Traité de Lisbonne.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Notre patrimoine est notre ADN, porteur d'une information héréditaire. C'est une part du passé que nous conservons soigneusement, que nous protégeons et chérissons pour la transmettre aux prochaines générations. Et dans laquelle nous nous reconnaissons comme membres d'une communauté humaine. Comme Européens aussi.

Le terrible incendie survenu le 15 avril à Notre-Dame de Paris, juste à quelques pas d'ici, a démontré la face profondément humaine de notre patrimoine. Indépendamment de leurs convictions, de leur nationalité, de leur âge, les Européens ont vécu cette tragédie comme la leur. Le patrimoine c'est en effet aussi notre histoire personnelle, qui s'entrelace avec la grande histoire, parfois de manière complexe.

Mesdames et messieurs,

Permettez-moi de continuer en anglais.

Recognising the need to respect and preserve people's cultural expressions is very close to me. It is the reflection of our collective memory that we wish to keep alive,

that defines us, that makes us belong to a community. Be it as a member of our town, our region, our country, our Europe.

Exploring cultural heritage not only helps us understand where we come from, but also understand each other better and live better together. Cherishing diversity is vital to counteract the downsides of globalisation, marginalisation of minorities and propaganda. This shared understanding, this feeling of concord reflect a society celebrating the culture of the other without fearing for the preservation of its own, and they were beautifully and compellingly celebrated during the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage.

The European Year was a resounding success: we saw many inspiring projects, and more than 23,000 events and actions across Europe. A large number of them took place in France - let me warmly thank the Ministry for their commitment and the work of their very competent services.

Looking ahead, I am very happy to note that cultural heritage is set to remain high on the European Union's agenda.

This summer, in the new strategic agenda for 2019-2024, EU leaders committed to 'invest in culture and cultural heritage, which are at the heart of our European identity'.

Last month, in her mission letter, Commissioner-designate Mariya Gabriel was tasked with strengthening 'Europe's commitment to preserving and protecting our cultural heritage.'

Her personal commitment to cultural heritage is clear. During the hearing in the European Parliament, Ms Gabriel acknowledged the incredible network of actors at EU level involved in the protection and promotion of Europe's cultural heritage. She also recognised the achievements of the European Year, and pledged to continue its legacy.

Our work in the coming years will be guided by the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage, which will contribute to secure the legacy of the European Year. As you know, it identified five main directions for EU's work on Europe's cultural heritage: from inclusion and sustainability, to protection and innovation, without forgetting the international context and the unique global partnerships that cultural heritage helps us forge.

But we must go further, and unlock the potential of cultural heritage to find new solutions to the many challenges we face today.

Climate change ranks high on the list of those challenges, and is a priority in the new political guidelines proposed by the European Commission president-elect, Ursula von der Leyen.

If not addressed, climate-change and natural hazards can increasingly damage cultural heritage.

But cultural heritage is also a source of resilience for communities. The value of cultural heritage-based solutions to climate change mitigation and adaptation is growing. So is the role of culture and heritage in climate action.

Historic buildings represent an important source of embodied carbon, energy, natural resources. Therefore, their re-use can contribute to lower emissions associated with building construction. This is in line with EU action towards climate targets fixed in the Paris Agreement.

I am glad to announce that a group of experts from EU Member States, with the support of my services, will soon start exchanging good practices on this topic; in particular, they will identify innovative measures for the historical environment in relation to climate change.

Today's debate will be an excellent contribution to the work we are starting on climate change. It will help us understand that we should better recognise the cultural dimensions of climate change and adjust heritage practices accordingly.

I believe that putting not only heritage, but also people at the centre is the prerequisite for the revival of the European project. Our people-centred approach to cultural heritage is a stepping stone for a better Europe.

Thank you.