

Europa Nostra Conference on Cultural Heritage - European Policy

Debate
30 October 2019, Paris

Speech by David Maria Sassoli, President of the European Parliament

Dear winners and organisers of the European Heritage Awards/Europa Nostra Awards 2019,

Unfortunately, other commitments have prevented me from attending this year's Grande soirée du patrimoine culturel and European Cultural Heritage Summit, but thanks to the wonders of technology I can at least be there with you in spirit and from afar.

As President of the European Parliament, I have the pleasure and the honour of congratulating all the participants and the winners in all four categories of this prestigious award: Conservation, Research, Dedicated Service and Education, Training and Awareness-raising.

Above all, the 2019 European Cultural Heritage Summit offers an opportunity to celebrate Europe's rich cultural heritage and to reward excellence in protecting and promoting that heritage. This event should be an occasion for joy and celebration, but it should also prompt us to take a hard look at ourselves.

Europe is going through a difficult time, and it faces an array of challenges: from climate change through the global issue of immigration and Brexit to the fight against all forms of inequality. For that reason, it is important that we work together on the basis of shared values, of a shared sense of inclusive European identity.

And what better means of fostering those values and that identity than our culture, which represents the very essence of our civilisation and the bridge linking Europe's past with its future?

Despite everything they have to offer, culture and cultural heritage are not yet at the heart of European policy-making. The European Year of Cultural Heritage, which we celebrated in 2018, was certainly a success and lent fresh impetus to our efforts. But still more needs to be done.

Focusing on culture and cultural heritage is one of the best and most effective ways of approaching the debate on the future of Europe, our sense of belonging and our identity, because culture and cultural heritage help us to remember who we are, where we come from and where we want to go.

At the same time, we must view culture as a force for integration, for inclusion not exclusion. The word 'culture' is often misused for political purposes, stripped of its real meaning by nationalists. It is often conflated with the idea of identity, so that it becomes synonymous with uniqueness or 'cultural' superiority, standing in the way of the development of democracy and undermining the rule of law.

For that reason, we must nurture 'culture', which means fostering it whatever form it takes, and also paying attention to our political culture. Our political culture must be commensurate

with our values, perhaps the most important of which is diversity - the diversity which our history and our cultural heritage remind us of every day.

It is not enough, therefore, for us simply to highlight the importance of our cultural heritage; instead, we must work together to make the EU motto of 'Unity in diversity' a reality and a pledge we honour every day.

Each one of you, in one way or another, has made an outstanding contribution to the task of protecting, enhancing and promoting our rich cultural heritage.

Please allow me, therefore, to express my appreciation and thanks for the commitment and the work for which you are being honoured here today.

We must continue to work together to exploit to the full the possibilities offered by our culture and our cultural heritage.

Good luck with your work!