

A Short address by Androulla Vassiliou
at the virtual event organized by Europa Nostra on the occasion of
International Women's Day on 8 March 2021

Dear Friends and colleagues,

Let me first wish you all a very happy Women's Day.

Women around the world, celebrate this day for two main reasons: Firstly, to note with satisfaction all the achievements in our efforts for Gender equality. For these achievements we are immensely grateful to our mothers, grand mothers and all previous generations of women who fought through the centuries to secure for women their basic rights, which are nothing else than Human Rights.

The second reason is of course to contemplate about our present and our future because the fight for gender equality is not over. We cannot be satisfied unless we succeed in eliminating violence against women. And I am referring to physical, sexual, psychological, or economic violence which is still prevalent not only in developing countries but also in the so called civilized world.

We cannot be content unless we see many more women in decision making positions, unless the pay gap between men and women is eliminated and unless we succeed in creating the right climate and the right circumstances to enable women to achieve the right balance between their family and their work responsibilities.

Dear colleagues,

Let us not forget that we participate in this virtual celebration of Women's Day in a very unique capacity. Firstly, of course, as women who participate and support the fight of women for gender equality but we are also here in our capacity as women who give our very special fight for the protection, restoration and preservation of cultural heritage in Europe. We are among those who fully recognize and appreciate the value of our European Cultural Heritage. We all share the belief that Europe would have been poorer without our historical, religious, archaeological monuments and sites, without our museums, our libraries, our opera houses our old cemeteries where our ancestors rest, without our castles and our fortresses and without preserving and protecting our beautiful nature.

We also share the view that Europe would be very different if we do not preserve our music, our dances, our paintings our embroideries our local cuisine, all these intangible heritage that makes Europe so rich and so distinct from other parts of the world.

Through the Annual European Heritage Awards, we witness every year the great work that is done by Europeans from different countries in our common fight to preserve, promote and protect both our tangible and intangible heritage of our continent.

A great percentage of these fighters are women. I therefore believe that on this Women's Day, we must express our thanks and gratitude to all the women who by their work contribute in making our Europe a better place to live in and also to bring closer together the people of Europe through culture and cultural heritage. I wish to start by thanking our dearest Secretary General, Snenska Quaedvlieg-Mihailovic who expanded Europa Nostra's horizons and gave our work more visibility and prominence. I wish to thank all the members of Europa Nostra's staff the majority of whom are women who enrich our work with their dedication and hard work. I also wish to thank the so many women who participate in the work of our Board, our Council and the different Juries and working committees. They spend time and energy in promoting the objectives of Europa Nostra and all the other organizations that form the European Alliance for Cultural heritage. But I also wish to pay tribute to all those women volunteers who work on the ground in different countries to achieve our goals.

My personal ambition, dear friends, is to see more young women and men joining our ranks of volunteers and strengthen even more our efforts for making Europe a better place to live and work in, through culture and cultural heritage. In this respect I welcome the recent joint initiative of Europa Nostra, the European Students Association for Cultural Heritage and the European Heritage Tribune to set up the European Heritage Youth Ambassadors Programme, This programme will foster the engagement of young people with cultural heritage and will encourage them to carry the torch forth. A great number of these young ambassadors are women.

Dear friends, I wish to end this short message by wishing you all, health, happiness and strength to continue our common strife for equality and for a peaceful and more harmonious Europe.