

Presentation Ceremony of the 1st Costa Carras European Citizens Award for the Safeguard of Endangered Heritage

European Cultural Centre of Delphi, Greece
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Speech by Claudia Apostol Volunteer at the Romanian NGO “ARA – Architecture. Restoration. Archeology”

May I start by thanking **Europa Nostra** and **Elliniki Etairia** for the great honour of granting us this very first Award honouring the work and the legacy of **Costa Carras**! Thank you, Madame President. We also want to thank the hosts of this event for giving us the opportunity to speak about who we are, what we do and what we stand for.

ARA - Architecture. Restoration. Archaeology is a Romanian professional non-governmental organisation established in 2006, with the aim to contribute to the protection and enhancement of Romania's endangered cultural heritage and achieve positive change in the field directly through the projects it runs. Our projects range from research on built heritage to direct documentation and conservation works involving local traditional communities; to field schools dedicated to education and training, with a focus on vernacular and experimental, to the annual “Architecture. Restoration. Archaeology” Symposium or to the publication of the annual peer-reviewed scientific journal Caiete ARA / ARA Reports and of other studies and research reports. We have been constantly involved in protecting the outstanding cultural heritage of Roşia Montană, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2021, through research and conservation, publications and advocacy, as well as performing community actions and developing public appreciation of the site.

Roşia Montană is the rural settlement with the highest number of listed historic monuments and the oldest mining town in Romania. Moreover, its universal value has been advocated for decades not only by our organisation, ARA, but also by ICOMOS, Europa Nostra, the Romanian Order of Architects, the Romanian Register of Urban Planners, the International Union of Architectes, the Architects Council of Europe, and a long list of international experts which advocated for the historic mining landscape of Roşia Montană to be given the UNESCO World Heritage Status (which was granted 2021). We are talking about a most exceptional site, recognised by the international professional community and legally protected by Romanian Law. This vast and exceptional landscape is also the place of the largest gold deposit of Europe. Since the late 1990s, a gold company started preparing here the biggest cyanide gold mining project in Europe, an initiative that met resistance from the local community and across the country, finally sparking an international response fueled by serious

concerns regarding the environmental and cultural impacts of this project, that would have destroyed the most important features of the heritage of Roşia Montană.

This is the context in which **ARA** started in 2006 a desperate **series of actions to recover, promote and raise awareness of the historic site of Roşia Montană**:

- a. **Documenting the built heritage of the site**, from buildings to landscape features, as the fundament of all our actions. This is what we have continuously done for the past 17 years; it is included in each yearly campaign conducted by ARA and it involves professionals from different fields, students and volunteers. More than 100 heritage features have been documented ever since.
- b. **Making emergency interventions** to secure endangered buildings, again with students and a strong community involvement, as part of our summer schools.
- c. **Identifying local resources** - traditional local skills, craftspeople, and materials that can enable the revival of a local economy endangered as well. This is a continuous learning process that is ongoing and it goes both ways.

These are the main pillars that made possible a more structured presence from ARA. In 2012 we started the Adopt a House programme, an initiative that gave everyone a chance to get involved, connecting volunteers to the very needs of the heritage, as we identified them, giving hundreds of people the opportunity to work on recovering the built heritage and to get to know the site first-hand.

I would like to go back a little bit on the general context of all these works. 2013 was a real game-changer for Roşia Montană. It was the year of the publication of the first list of **7 Most Endangered monuments and heritage sites in Europe**; Roşia Montană was listed and, thanks to Europa Nostra, therefore highlighted as a major cultural heritage hotspot with huge potential under imminent threat. This brought a more focused attention on the matter of Roşia Montană at international level.

2013 was also the year of what we call in Romania „the revolution of a generation”. Huge protests took place in all main cities in Romania and beyond, from London and Berlin to Rome and New York. One of the main claims of the protests was explicitly the inclusion of the Roşia Montană historic mining landscape on UNESCO’s List of World Heritage in Danger. For the first time in Romania, the issue of endangered heritage was out on the streets and shouted out by tens of thousands of voices worldwide. The result of these protests was that the Romanian Government and the Parliament abandoned the bill that was designed to make the mining project legally possible.

2014 was also very important, a true milestone in our struggle for the heritage of Roşia Montană and our attempt to include the site on UNESCO’s World Heritage List. The Europa Nostra mission to Romania and Roşia Montană, part of the 7 Most Endangered programme, was the moment that **Costa Carras** and fellow participants **John Sell** and **Guy Clause** came to meet the community in Roşia Montană and address the challenges of our common struggle. Costa Carras, together with Europa Nostra, gave a well-deserved voice to the sustainable development scenario we all envision for Roşia Montană. Europa Nostra remained one of our most important supporters.

During the years that followed, our presence in Roşia Montană was structured in several directions: conservation projects, emergency interventions and a new design and build programme for promoting heritage – all small-scale interventions to facilitate the interpretation of the site both for the community and visitors alike. We also organised public events on site - both for the community and the general public - together with local active partners. Promoting the heritage also meant preparing and publishing a series of materials, from photo albums to intervention guides for the local community, brochures and thematic studies dedicated to the main features of the historic site.

In 2021 Roşia Montană was finally inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, a recognition of the exceptional importance of the site and also of all our efforts – ARA, together with Europa Nostra, the local community, the specialists involved in our programme, the hundreds of volunteers that contributed all these years. It is not the end of our efforts, but a new beginning for us and of what should be a real construction phase, consistent and scaled up to the real needs of the site. We are also very happy that this moment made the central and local public authorities to take steps towards the conservation of the site as well.

I will end this brief presentation with this image that is for us one small but significant proof that it is all worth it: a theatre play, organised by a local organisation in partnership with a national theatre company in one of the properties restored by ARA. Not so long ago it was abandoned and almost collapsed, and now it is the venue for a cultural event fuelled by the local community. More events like this will follow. Our local partners are preparing a children's festival for the summer, another theatre marathon and the 3rd local cultural festival called Rosia Montană ALIVE. We are also preparing for the 12th edition of the AoC programme and the local public authorities have several other projects ongoing as well.

“There so much to be done in Roşia Montană” - **Costa Carras** said these words in 2014. Today we reiterate this message, for all these opportunities are now open and they can change the fate of the community and the heritage of Roşia Montană, which until not long ago was seen as a lost cause.

For all this, and for the Award we are so deeply honoured to receive today, we thank Europa Nostra for the continuous support, Elliniki Etairia and also all our partners and collaborators; but above all, we thank our very active local community partners. We can't wait to go back to Roşia Montană this weekend to share the joy of this Award with all and each of them.