



LET US JOIN FORCES TO ENSURE A SUSTAINABLE AND VIABLE FUTURE FOR THE ENDANGERED VENICE AND ITS LAGOON

Europa Nostra statement on the World Heritage site of Venice and its Lagoon

on the occasion of

the 45th session of the World Heritage Committee held in Riyadh

and

the European Cultural Heritage Summit marking the 60th anniversary of Europa Nostra to be held in Venice (27-30 September 2023)

As early as 2016, in the framework of our 7 Most Endangered programme, Europa Nostra and its partner, the European Investment Bank Institute, [declared](#) the Venice Lagoon as THE most endangered heritage site in Europe, thus sounding a clear and loud alarm on the ever-growing dangers threatening this worldwide renown World Heritage Site.

In 2019, at the 43rd session of the World Heritage Committee in Baku, Europa Nostra [deplored](#) that the site was not inscribed on the World Heritage List in Danger, considering the many and increasing dangers it faced, with a special emphasis on the disastrous effects of big cruise ships on the historic centre of Venice and the fragile ecosystem of its lagoon, the ever-growing pressure of tourism and the huge environmental and social threats due to climate change.

In 2021, during the 44th session of the World Heritage Committee in Fuzhou, we [applauded](#) the long-awaited decision by the Italian government to stop the passage of big cruise ships close to the historic city centre as a first but important step in the right direction, while awaiting the adoption and the implementation of a holistic long-term plan for the safeguarding of the site. In the same year, we issued our [European Cultural Heritage Green Paper](#) insisting that holding global temperature rise to 1.5°C was a crucial threshold to safeguard a large number of our heritage sites and avoid the loss of biodiversity. This is true for Venice and its Lagoon as it is for many other World Heritage sites. Unfortunately, as demonstrated in the [UNFCC Global Stock-take Synthesis Report](#) released last week, we are dangerously far from meeting this vital objective.

Confirming our ongoing special interest in and concern for Venice and its Lagoon, today we wish to stress that it appears from the report provided by Italy and from the UNESCO state of conservation report submitted to the World Heritage Committee that several important safeguarding measures are in preparation or have even been already implemented at various levels of governance, including the emblematic MOSE system of mobile gates, which currently protects Venice and its Lagoon from extreme tides, but needs adjusting to continue being effective also in the future with the projected rise of sea level. However, we also recall that much still remains to be done, among others, in the domains of the control and decrease of over-tourism, the gradual ban of all kinds of big ships from entering the lagoon and, in particular, the mitigation of the negative impacts of climate change which also poses a serious threat to world heritage sites across the Globe.

We would like therefore to duly acknowledge the progresses made, while urging the Italian and local government, as well as all other stakeholders, public or private, to pursue and further accelerate and intensify their efforts given the fact that the measures already taken remain insufficient. We also urge the international community led by UNESCO, and the European community led by the European Union, to step up their indispensable support to the Italian authorities and civil society to successfully address all the challenges and threats affecting Venice and its Lagoon, especially since these threats are not purely local but also global, such as climate change and over tourism.

Europa Nostra is naturally also eager to contribute to this much-needed mobilisation of the European and international communities in support of Italian authorities and civil society dedicated to the safeguard of Venice and its Lagoon. Europa Nostra's decisions to open an office in Venice and to hold in this World Heritage city this year's [European Cultural Heritage Summit](#) which marks the 60th anniversary of our organisation confirm this strong commitment, including the first public [Forum organised by the European Heritage Hub](#) which aims to make use of culture and heritage as an asset for a transformative climate action and which also contributes to the programme of the 1st [Biennale della Sostenibilità](#).

In view of the above, and after a careful consideration of various positions, Europa Nostra believes that the proposal made by UNESCO's Secretariat to inscribe Venice and its Lagoon on the World Heritage List in Danger at this year's World Heritage Committee would not aid the ongoing necessary efforts by the Italian authorities and civil society and on the contrary risk to jeopardize rather than improve what has been already positively achieved. At the same time, we reiterate our strong appeal to the Italian government and the local and regional authorities to further and resolutely continue their action against all identified threats.

In the light of the above, we urge the members of the World Heritage Committee to postpone to the next session of the Committee any decision concerning the possible inscription of Venice and its Lagoon on the World Heritage List in Danger, after a careful examination of next year's state of conservation report to be submitted by the Italian government, which should include urgently needed modelling of future climate scenarios and their impacts on the outstanding universal value of Venice and its Lagoon, as requested by UNESCO.

Let us indeed continue working all together - the international, European, national, regional and local authorities, institutions and the civil society - to improve the sustainability and livability of this invaluable World Heritage site which Europa Nostra continues to consider as being THE most endangered heritage site in Europe. To achieve this goal, we must constantly evaluate the effectiveness of any existing and new mitigation measures and we must jointly promote and implement a truly holistic plan for ensuring a sustainable and inclusive future for Venice and its Lagoon, for the benefit of its residents and also for the benefit of its many visitors from all over the world.

We must indeed recognise more clearly and more widely the immense dangers and challenges for cultural heritage sites across the globe that flow from the combined impact of global greenhouse emissions and global tourism, as it was recently highlighted in the [Venice Sustainability Foundation meeting](#) on dangers for coastal cities around the globe. Therefore, we today need a much bolder and more effective international collaboration – under the leadership and with the due involvement of UNESCO and other relevant international, European and national bodies -, to find and implement global, transformative solutions to these worldwide problems.