

The Hague, 10 September 2026

**For the attention of Mrs Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission**

Subject: State of the European Union: Cultural Heritage as vital asset for Europe's cohesion, resilience, competitiveness and security

Dear Madam President,

A few days ahead of your very important speech on the State of the European Union, we felt an urgency and a necessity to write to you in our capacity as Executive President and Secretary General of **Europa Nostra, the largest organisation in Europe committed to the protection of Cultural Heritage**, tangible and intangible which is a long standing civil society interlocutor and partner of the European Union.

First of all, we would like to reiterate our congratulations to you for two recent major EU policy documents, namely the **Culture Compass for Europe** and the **Joint Declaration which you co-signed with the Presidents of the European Parliament and the Council of the EU** under the motto **"Europe for Culture - Culture for Europe"**. We consider these two documents as crucial milestones for the European Union in a world marked by violence and polarisation, as well as by uncertainty and anxiety.

In these present circumstances, we trust your SOTEU address will devote the necessary attention, on the one hand, to the consolidation of our economic and trade perspectives as well as to the resilience and risk preparedness in the face of climate emergencies, and on the other, to the necessity to increase our defence and security capacities, in response to the ongoing threats created outside our borders but also from the growing external intrusion within our democracies.

We strongly believe that boosting our competitiveness and defending and affirming the resilience of our democracies needs to be underpinned by the reinforcement of a vital additional pillar of our European project, namely the **citizens and civilisational pillar**. With the alarming reality of the rise of the extremes throughout our continent and beyond, this pillar requires urgent and resolute attention and action from all European leaders and from all segments of our society.

The European project, in the current troubled world, remains attractive to a large number of Europeans, as confirmed by the latest Eurobarometers. But we cannot deny also that a growing number of our citizens, often influenced or manipulated by external actors, consider the European project as a scapegoat, responsible for their fears and their legitimate concerns. This is why the EU needs to urgently adapt its narrative if it wants to continue to play a substantial geopolitical role on the world's turbulent scene. To do this, the European Union has, fortunately, **two major assets**: the **core values** which form the very foundation of the European project, and our **shared cultural heritage**, which is what links Europeans together and forms the basis of our common identity. **This European layer of our identity is not a threat but an enrichment** to all other layers of our identities which range from family, local and regional identities to national and European ones.



**The European Voice of
Civil Society committed to
Cultural Heritage**

www.europanostra.org

International Secretariat
Secrétariat international
Lange Voorhout 15
NL - 2514 EA Den Haag
T +31 70 302 40 50
E info@europanostra.org

Brussels Office
Bureau de Bruxelles
2 Avenue Palmerston
B - 1000 Bruxelles
E bxl@europanostra.org

ING Bank (NL) N° 63 18 630
IBAN: NL63INGB0006318630
BIC: INGBNL2A

KvK (NL) N° 27281560



These **core values** of peace, democracy, solidarity, human rights and the rule of law represent the essence of Europe's legacy to the world. They are the result of a long and often painful historical process, but they are what differentiates Europe from many other parts of the world; they represent the attractiveness of our way of life for the people of the world who continue to believe in these values. **They form the basis of our humanistic and civilisational model, something we need to be proud of.**

Our **shared cultural heritage**, which is so rich and diverse, is the visible expression of these values. They are the result of immense intercultural exchanges throughout the centuries, something that links all Europeans together across borders and across generations. They are the tangible and intangible testimony of what our artists, our writers, our musicians, our philosophers, our craftsmen have produced at their best, drawing inspiration from each other; something that the entire world admires. This is something that matters to Europe's citizens (cf. Special Eurobarometer 562). Something each of us should be proud of - pride and confidence in ourselves are words that we maybe don't use enough. While being the legacy of our common past, they are also a source of inspiration for our present generations of artists and creators, and a basis on which Europe, and particularly the European Union, can build and affirm renewed vision for the future of Europe and for the future of our Planet. At the same time, our cultural heritage is a vital resource for Europe's competitiveness and attractiveness, while heritage-led regeneration of our historic cities and countryside can provide sustainable and affordable housing and effective contribution to the green transformation of our economy and society in line with the principles of the New European Bauhaus. Last but not least, cultural heritage can provide a vital asset in support of EU enlargement and EU's relationship with the rest of the world, especially within the EU's Pact for the Mediterranean.

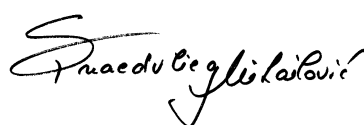
Dear Madam President,

The State of the European Union address represents a unique occasion to set a new impetus for our continent. Cultural Heritage is not something that we need to create. It is something that we need to build on. No other continent has developed so intensely the link between its values and its cultural legacy. This is why we believe that these elements should be duly reflected in this most important and awaited speech. **We therefore strongly encourage you to place and name our shared cultural heritage among the elements that can help the European Union to effectively respond to the pressing challenges:** by strengthening Europe's risk preparedness and necessary adaptation in the face of climate emergencies or threats to peace and security as well as by boosting Europe's comparative advantages for the competitiveness of our economy and for the wellbeing of our democratic society. We count on you to deliver this message of hope and confidence to the citizens of Europe and to demonstrate to the people and nations of the world a stronger cultural leadership.

Respectfully and sincerely yours,



Hermann Parzinger
Executive President



Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailović
Secretary General