

SPEECH - PIET JASPAERT
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Cultural heritage is not only about sites, landscapes en archaeology; it's also and mostly about people

On June 11th, in this same city Istanbul - one of the European Capitals of Culture in 2010 - Europa Nostra held its yearly Forum, entitled "Multiple Identities - a Common Heritage", as part of its Annual Congress programme.

Daniel Therond, Deputy Director for Culture, Cultural and Natural Heritage at the Council of Europe and speaker at our Forum, took the opportunity to invite Europa Nostra as the representative of civil society engaged in heritage, to contribute to the European Heritage Forum on "Cultural Heritage, Participation and Prosperity" which brings us together today in Istanbul, on the occasion of the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the European Heritage Days. At that moment we were happy to be able to launch our Magazine 'Heritage in Motion', you all received in your congressbag. This is a unique way to discover this multi-layered metropolis through the eyes of scientist and activists, the eyes of historians, travellers, musicians and writers,

Europa Nostra was pleased to contribute to the growth of the European Heritage Days, in particular during the two years during which Europa Nostra acted as Liaison Office between the co-partners of the Council of Europe and the European Commission on the one hand, and the National European Heritage Days Coordinators on the other. More recently, we were in charge of the preparation of the special 25th anniversary brochure which you will all have received and which – we hope – you will enjoy reading and widely disseminating. Finally Europa Nostra is on behalf of the European Commission and the Council of Europe in charge of the European Prizes for Cultural Heritage that were made public in Istanbul this year and next year in Amsterdam.

Today, I would like to speak to you about the remarkable intellectual and strategic evolution that all those working in the field of cultural heritage have recently become aware of. In the Cultural Heritage field, in the past and still today, it is considered important to protect, to save, to preserve, to restore and to manage the objects, buildings and sites of cultural heritage, and also to give them an adequate and sometimes new destination or function. We strived to move the value and importance of these objects, buildings or sites high enough on the priority list of the various authorities. We had to make sure to consider and emphasise in our plea their economic value, and their contribution to job creation and sustainability. These subjects will be discussed further in our afternoon programme.

But this morning, I would like to discuss with you something completely different, and probably even more important, especially in a time of economic crisis, ethnic tensions and conflicts between communities. I am referring to the growing awareness that Cultural Heritage is omnipresent, and that it holds deep meanings that we need to understand better and constitutes a fundamental human right for all of us to be connected to.

This fundamental human right of access to and the ability of expressing one's cultural heritage is now presented and defended in a very convincing and inspiring manner in two forward-looking and seminal European documents: the Council of Europe's Faro "Framework Convention on the value of Cultural heritage for society" that hopefully very soon can enter into force and their Manifesto for Multiple Cultural Affiliation that

throws light on the potential that cultural multiple affiliation represents for human development and mutual understanding as a means of fostering peace and stability in Europe. This very inspiring text has been translated into Turkish thanks to the efforts of Orhan Sillier, my colleague in the Europa Nostra's board, and the Europa Nostra Istanbul Office.

In those two documents, Cultural heritage is considered a thriving force in building the identity and personality of each human being as an individual and as a part of various and varying circles.

This is clearly described in Article 2 of the Faro Convention:

"... Cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past in which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time ..."

This means that cultural heritage is a constantly evolving project borne by a population and not only an object which can be defined on an artistic, technical, scientific or even purely historical basis. This suggests that cultural heritage appears to function as a catalyst for participation and social inclusion. A number of our speakers this morning will illustrate this with some convincing case studies.

In its Article 2, the Faro Convention launched another concept as well, that of the "heritage community". A Heritage Community "consists of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations". In this way, cultural heritage can be seen as a resource that forges and connects communities. Both the Faro Convention and the Manifesto for Multiple Cultural Affiliation clearly describe the challenges that the valorisation and valuation of the diversity of our cultural heritage within our multi-layer society presents for governments and for us as individual citizens. But, if we succeed in this endeavour, we contribute to sustainable human development and to the improvement of the quality of life for all.

The basis of a "heritage community" is a "common heritage" and this is defined in Article 3 of that same convention as follows:

" Common heritage consists of :

- a) all forms of cultural heritage in Europe, which together constitute a shared resource of remembrance, understanding, identity, cohesion and creativity;
- b) the ideals, principals and values, derived from the experience gained through progress and past conflicts, which foster the development of a peaceful and stable society, founded on respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Article 7, then, explains in a concise way what is required to achieve this objective and how to keep the effort going. The central idea is that, thanks to knowledge, reflection and life-long education and training, cultural heritage can lead people to respect for diversity, to reconciliation, to trust and mutual understanding, and can facilitate peaceful coexistence and/or prevention of conflicts.

In the process of achieving this ambitious goal we will face several setbacks and obstacles, such as :

- the confrontation of different and even opposite values attributed to the cultural heritage;
- different levels of interest or lack of them amongst people;

- priority management (or, in other words, political agendas);
- bureaucracy opposed to voluntary participation of citizens;
- self-interest;
- different symbolic values;
- lack of resources;
- the necessity of education and awareness training; and
- the risk of manipulation.

These likely roadblocks, however, will not be fatal, provided we stay focused on the final goal.

Apart from the responsibility borne by all the various authorities and the personal commitment of individuals, a very important role remains to be played by non-governmental heritage organisations. Civil society initiatives and commitments of this kind can act as pace-makers and go-betweens for a democratic and peaceful society, rooted in an openness to cultural heritage that connects and calls for accountability.

No matter how different or unequal the situation for all the organisations in the various countries may be, we should never take the easiest way out to avoid possible conflicts or accept decisions from the past without critical reflection. On the contrary, cultural heritage presents us the unique opportunity to build bridges between cultures and traditions, to construct a more peaceful world - notwithstanding existing conflicts, tension, frustrations or just cold feet.

It is only when we approach cultural heritage from a human point of view, and discover and cherish it as a catalyst of interpersonal relationships, transforming the latter for the better and acting as a powerful enabler for participation and social inclusion, we can start to open fresh horizons.

It is useful also to recall here the Lisbon Treaty, with its references to participatory democracy. The Treaty formally states that good governance implies explicit involvement of all concerned communities and individuals in each single decision making process.

This is why it is essential that we focus not only on the tangible cultural heritage. An integral and integrated approach to tangible and intangible heritage is the only one which we should be promoting.

Understanding the purpose, the intelligence, the talent, the patience, the creativity and the power of the creation hidden behind each item of cultural heritage will allow us to recognise and appreciate the social community connected to this particular heritage. A community must be considered with all its self-will, large or small, powerful or weak, rich or poor, proud or humble, respected or rejected, at home or exiled, autochthonous or migrant. A heritage community is the living result of the interaction of people and their environment. But the same heritage can also be threatened, endangered or broken down by people themselves, by authorities and regimes, as well as by other elements as, for instance, nature itself.

This is what happened in L'Aquila in Italy, when it was hit by a powerful earthquake in April 2009: first, the historical centre of the city was damaged or destroyed, and next the inhabitants had to be evacuated from their homes and now live in newly built houses outside the city. An existing local community was abruptly separated from its cultural heritage and does not accept

this amputation to become definitive. The community, therefore, has united in protest against the authorities' policy and has claimed both its fundamental right to proximity to its historical cultural biotope and the availability of the necessary investments needed for the latter's restoration. Their voice has been picked up and amplified by other segments of the heritage community, all rallying for the same kind of heritage. The broad heritage community in Italy feels deep concern and an utmost solidarity with the people from L'Aquila, has started to speak up, to offer support and to campaign for them. Shared responsibility is a mighty weapon in this kind of fight. The Italian heritage community needs and deserves our common support. On a European level, other people, from other nationalities or cultures, should feel compelled to stand up and plead the L'Aquila inhabitants' case.

As you all know, I am a member of the Board of Europa Nostra, that works hard to be the Voice of Cultural Heritage in Europa: I therefore want to quote our newly appointed President Plácido Domingo here, who, on the occasion of his Rigoletto performance last month in Mantova, was asked for a comment on the L'Aquila heritage. This is what he said: "In accepting the Europa Nostra's Presidency, I hope that we will work to safeguard Europe's cultural heritage whenever it is threatened by natural calamities, by human beings or by neglect. In doing so, we should attach particular importance to the people who are connected to this heritage and for whom this heritage forms part of their everyday living environment and their identity. Our mission is not only about stones; it is also and mostly about people! People (in L'Aquila) have not only lost their houses, they lost the memory and the roots which are connected to the historic city of L'Aquila. The inhabitants of L'Aquila are not looking to find a new city in which to live, they wish their historic city to be restored in order that they can come back to live where their ancestors have been living for centuries."

But as I said already earlier heritage cannot only be in danger, at risk or threatened by nature. It can as well be endangered by authorities as in the case of Allionoy, here in Turkey. As well as in L'Aquila civil society groups and organisations on national and international level have joined efforts and spoke up to prevent this invaluable archeological site of Allionoy being flooded behind the Yortanlı irrigation dam. The executive president of Europa Nostra has recently been writing a letter to Mr Güll, the president of Turkey with the ultimate hope that such a tragedy could still be avoided thanks to his courage and clear vision of Turkey's long term interests.

Cross-frontier heritage communities can act as spokesmen or advocates for national, regional or local heritage communities and can breach national, regional or local walls of indifference and neglect. In this way, instances of heritage in peril anywhere in the world can be swiftly and successfully recognised as being important for the future of us all.

Another remarkable example of Europe-wide heritage community efforts are the European Heritage Days, ever-growing throughout our continent now already for about 25 years. As multi-layered and diverse as these may be, they are and should remain a wonderful instrument of creating awareness and connection to cultural heritage that hopefully never will be given up by the Council of Europe or by the European Union and the European Commission. They are not only eye-catchers, they are door-openers and also watchdogs, they are the glue that unites people around cultural heritage, they should be alarm-bells for what is threatened and showcases for what merits respect, support and funding. In one word, they offer each of us a totem and a platform for a living European

citizenship, based on mutual recognition of different cultures and an attachment to shared values.

Let me conclude by quoting the French Lebanese author Amin Maalouf. In his essay "*Le dérèglement du monde*", he asserts that we need to promote (or opt for) "a humanity aware of the common fate for all people and that therefore gathers behind the same fundamental values, but at the same time goes on more than ever developing the most rich variety of cultural ways of expression and maintains all languages, artistic traditions, techniques, views, memories and knowledge."

As long as we will not fence in cultural heritage as private property or as mere state property, it will stand a chance to function as a focal point of recognition for one or more communities, and in so doing protect its own future.

If authorities respect the citizens' right to their cultural heritage and their communities, and if they grasp their responsibility in partnership with them, the chances for a peaceful and democratic living together can only grow. A society based on these principles offers opportunity for shared responsibility amongst authorities, professionals and volunteers, and enables involved citizens to really develop and nurture a sense of multicultural affiliation.

In this way, we can contribute to a lifelong open, changeable and multiple sociocultural identity. And as Maalouf states, this needs "conscious actions, civilised actions, which require sharpness and perseverance. Teaching people to live together is a long battle that will never be over. This calls for a well-considered approach, pedagogical skills, but also a matching legislation and adequate institutions".

The title of my speech was "Heritage is not only about sites, landscapes and archaeology; it is also and mostly about people".

Martin Luther King phrased it in a slightly different way already back in 1964: "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools."

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