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Launching Colloquy of

« Heritage and Beyond »

a publication on the contribution of the Council of Europe
Framework Convention on the value of cultural heritage for
society (Faro Convention)

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*Cultural Heritage: the role of the Council of Europe
Parliamentary Assembly*

"Heritage and Beyond"

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1-The Faro Convention arose from a decision of the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe, but is also deeply linked to the debate on issues of cultural heritage, which have been conducted over the years within the context of its Parliamentary Assembly.

Constituted by a coming together of delegations representing 47 member states, the Parliamentary Assembly of the CE is a forum for open and free discussion between members from different backgrounds, ethnicities, faiths and cultures, speaking in all the languages of Europe, bringing to the forum of Strasbourg as personal baggage the sum of their acquired cultural heritage, to ponder creatively the means to increase it, as well as striving to safeguard it. But also within this baggage are the old (and current) tensions that accompany the definition of the delegate's own cultural identity as opposed to the identity of "others." To this may be added the difficulty of communication, mistrust of what is different, the shadow of recurrent conflicts in the name of alleged ethnic superiority in terms of religion, language, and culture.

All this is present when the 570 deputies of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe meet four times a year in Strasbourg.

They are the bearers of a remarkable conjunction of knowledge and experience. There are professionals in all fields, politicians from all quarters, experts in all areas of knowledge. The analysis that they make of the subjects under discussion is neither neutral nor detached, even if objectivity is a working tool; the proposals they present are not aseptic nor frigid, even though the documentation that

supports them is scientifically and technically grounded.

The decisions of PACE are thus filtered through the historical and cultural legacies of the people who inhabit Europe, from the Atlantic to Asia, from the Arctic to the Mediterranean. They reflect memories of grandeur and cruelty, but also the dream and the will to build a peace that values diversity, supported by the intransigent defence of human rights.

It would be difficult to find a better forum within which to talk about culture and heritage with such a close and extensive knowledge of all its implications. PACE is therefore a powerful instrument to commend to the laws, and especially to the people who they represent, the profound significance and innovation of the successive agreements on cultural heritage. This role is especially necessary in the case of the Convention of the Council of Europe on the value of cultural heritage for society.

The present Convention framework establishes above all the principles: do not create rights without talking of responsibilities; include the intangible heritage and what is contemporary; speak of the common heritage and its value, regardless of who generated it; link heritage to inter-cultural dialogue, sustainable development, quality of life, democratic participation, encourages member states to develop policies in the pan-European and global context and call for the participation of all citizens.

In other words, it breaks with many of the more popular ideas of "heritage" and "the past" as "buildings" or "objects" of ownership and responsibility solely of the community which, in times gone by, produced it.

Hence the great difficulty in being understood, even within the Council of Europe. Hence the great responsibility of PACE and all the national parliaments

represented in it, through its legislative functions, through the monitoring and ratification of the proposals and practices of governments, but also through their contacts with the electorate, to get the Convention framework adopted, applied, and put into practice.

2 - The Faro Convention marks a time of change for customary conventions on cultural heritage (whether those of the CE or other institutions such as UNESCO).

This qualitative leap is in line with progress made by PACE, and especially, by the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, since its inception.

European cultural co-operation began to take shape with an eight-point program proposed by PACE in 1949, from which would be created the European Convention of 1954, conceived as the framework for co-operation between formerly hostile countries.

Since then, numerous reports, resolutions and recommendations have been produced, based on remarkable groundwork studies of concrete situations carried out in difficult circumstances, as well as numerous conferences and seminars to draw conclusions and indicate courses of action.

We can systematise this work in two main areas:

- a) On the **protection of architectural and artistic heritage**, the list is long and reflects on the one hand, attention to specific cases - such as the protection of Venice, Pylos, Istanbul, Orvieto, Pompeii, Rosia Montana, or the safe-guarding from destruction of Roman villages, of cultural property in Afghanistan, Iraq, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and in Kosovo. On the other hand, it reflects a concern to promote and conduct activities of a more general kind: to protect the architectural and cultural heritage of Europe,

including its social aspects; to safeguard the undersea cultural heritage, industrial archaeology, de-commissioned religious, military and hospital buildings, commemorative memorials, the rural arts and crafts, libraries and scientific archives, contemporary architecture, pilgrimage routes; to insure the protection of the heritage against disasters, to recommend fiscal measures to encourage heritage conservation and to find appropriate models for the private management of cultural property. One can also find much work done on the looting, trafficking or trading in cultural objects and works of art, the promotion of art history and teaching of history in conflict zones.

b) On **language and literature**, many aspects have been addressed and recommended. I need only mention the defence of modern languages, with particular attention to the minority languages and dialects of Europe, freedom of expression and the role of the writer, the right of borrowing in public libraries, the price of books, the cultural dimension of broadcasting, literary translation, the mother tongue in education, the teaching of European literature.

Spanning the two areas we find the European Museums Prize. Since 1977, the award highlights annually the museum, regardless of size and theme, which best promotes a European vision or an essential factor in its history or culture.

We can also note important decisions for the Convention being debated today: for example, resolutions on the role of national parliaments, local authorities and independent associations in the conservation of architectural heritage, and the recommendations of the campaign "Europe, a Common Heritage".

If we look at this set of decisions taken by the PACE arising from the Commission's proposals for Culture, Science and Education, we realise that the Convention on the value of cultural heritage for society is the logical and necessary corollary of extensive survey work, of reflection and debate within the larger inter-parliamentary assembly in Europe, epitomising their concerns in an innovative way and giving

them a new context for future work.

Moreover, in being known as the Faro Convention it also reflects this connection: not only do we speak of "Faro" as the Algarve town where the signing of the agreement took place during the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of Europe, we read also in the epithet a deserved tribute to the then deputy Guilherme Oliveira Martins who, as a member of PACE, led the working group responsible for drafting the Convention;

3 - Finally, let me repeat that we still have much to do to turn the framework convention on the value of heritage to society into an effective tool for promoting the creative life of European cultural diversity and a dialogue with the cultures of the people of other continents who, like us, also look for their space.

Only 15 member states of the Council of Europe signed the Convention, and only 8 ratified it. Of the 15 who signed, only 5 belong to the European Union.

Among the participants in this symposium were individuals from the United Kingdom, Italy, Malta, France and Slovakia - individuals deeply engaged, by what they have shown us here, in its application. However, their countries still have not signed the Faro Convention.

What is to prevent or impede the accession of many countries, some of which have always been engines of European cultural co-operation and advocates of inter-cultural dialogue based on the equal dignity of cultures?

To detect the reasons for refusal and deconstruct the arguments on which they are based is therefore a hard job for us all. I am sure that the PACE will have a considerable role to play in this mission.

It will be very difficult for Europe to have a place and an important role in today's

world if we lose our ability to reconcile cultural traditions and practices essential to the protection of human rights.

But in order to do so, Europe will have to lead by example within the confines of its own home.