

Lisbon, 20 November 2009

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)

Mr Dag Myklebust

*“A peek at the Future” speech by Mr. Portoroz Faro on 27
October 2014*

Speech by Mr Portoroz Faro, Minister for Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Transbordania, on the occasion of the 5th anniversary of the ratification of the Faro Convention, addressing the Government of the Republic of Transbordania on 27 October 2014, delivered in the Palace of Human and Cultural Rights in the capital, Pluralia

Mr Prime Minister, dear colleagues.

I am honoured by your presence on this extremely important occasion for our country.

Today marks the 5th anniversary of our country's ratification of the Faro Convention, which, as you by now know very well, is the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society.

When we ratified this convention on 27 October 2009 – exactly four years after it opened for signature in Faro, Portugal – we felt that we contributed to a great European moment. Our ratification meant that this convention went into effect, since Transbordania was the tenth country to ratify.

The very purpose of celebrating today is to take a retrospective look on how the Faro Convention has influenced cultural heritage management and social and economic development based on heritage assets in our great country. I will give you the final conclusion straight away: the results are formidable and very much justify a celebration.

We have, however, to go back to the prehistory of this convention, to fully understand its nature and its great value and importance.

The Council of Europe gained new importance following the geopolitical changes in Europe after 1991. It was in reality a test of democracy for the new countries being allowed to access this organisation. This also meant a boost for the different specialised committees in the Council of Europe, since from then on they met new colleagues from an increasing number of countries seeking to gain experience from the old member countries.

For me, at that time serving as a cultural heritage bureaucrat representing my country in the Cultural Heritage Committee, it was a great experience to witness the vividness of this professional exchange, and to watch the creation of a broader and broader network of highly qualified colleagues sharing experiences and ideas. But before long, this work was being performed against a backdrop of civil wars on European soil, enhancing ethnic and religious differences, in which cultural heritage objects became military targets.

This of course set new agendas in the Council of Europe's work on cultural heritage. Themes such as cultural heritage and territory came up. Questions like who has the responsibility for the heritage of others on the land you control became pertinent. The necessity to respect the rights of minorities in order to protect their heritage became obvious.

Another important perspective was the role of heritage in understanding the great challenge of making development sustainable.

All this led to a decision in the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to instruct the Steering Committee for Cultural Heritage to prepare a draft for a framework convention addressing the new issues in cultural heritage protection in a European political perspective.

Now, at this time, serving as a diplomat in the Transbordanian delegation in Strasbourg, I had the opportunity to follow the work leading to the final text of the convention. We should make no secret of the fact that this was somewhat controversial. There were fears in some countries, not least the big west European countries, that this convention would make them confront challenges that they were not prepared to meet.

Important in this debate were the voices of many countries from central and eastern Europe who said: "We need this convention because it addresses our problems".

For some European countries signing and ratifying this convention was very much an act of solidarity.

Let me then finally place myself in my present role as a politician and as a cabinet member, and turn to the main theme of today: How did our beloved country, Transbordania, benefit from ratifying and taking seriously the message of the Faro Convention?

First of all, I must say that we remarkably and maybe surprisingly benefited from the big economic recession that started in the second half of 2008. This meant a great loss for many people, not least those who lost their jobs, but it also meant a great opportunity to rethink. It opened a possibility of focusing on lasting values, and not least realising that there could be a combination of different types of values in utilising cultural heritage assets in economic and social development. I am convinced that, through our government's targeted efforts in sustaining employment in restoration and rehabilitation of our built heritage in that critical period, we set a solid platform for our building business which once again is blooming. It is today as much oriented towards maintenance and refining old buildings into new uses as it is towards new construction. The number of people employed in the building sector is now 50% higher than in August 2008, and all the new jobs are in concerned with preserving our values, cultural as well as economic.

So what has this famous Faro Convention meant for us?

In order to understand that, we have to take a look at ourselves.

We have, as many other European countries, had a very turbulent and shifting history. We are nevertheless happy today to have no border disputes. We have a multicultural population. Nowadays, we are, however, not necessarily proud of our history of handling

our minorities. But we have addressed this issue, not least with the help of the Faro Convention.

So please allow me to take a little more of your time, colleague ministers, to set out the specific actions taken as a result of our ratification of the Faro Convention. I know that you will permit this, since it has actually been you and your ministries who have implemented all of this.

Let us look at the convention text itself.

The first article reminds us that the rights to cultural heritage are inherent in the right to participate in cultural life, and that there is both an individual and a collective responsibility for protecting the heritage.

Inspired by the Swedish Cultural Heritage Act, we have put this into our own new cultural heritage legislation. I quote, as the first paragraph of this reads:

It is a national responsibility to protect and maintain our cultural environment. The responsibility for this is shared by everybody. Individual persons as well as authorities shall respect and take care of the cultural heritage. Every undertaking or enterprise must secure that no damage is done to the cultural heritage.

By ratifying the convention we committed our homeland, Transbordania, to be aware of the role of cultural heritage in the construction of a peaceful and democratic society, and our five years of experience has shown us the importance of this. We have to pay respect to all the different heritage communities in our country, and secure their rights to benefit from the cultural heritage as well as to contribute towards its enrichment.

That is why we have included this right in our constitution.

We here looked at the Finnish Constitution's Article 17, which says that "the Sami as indigenous people as well as the Roma and other groups have the right to preserve and develop their language and their culture".

Two practical examples of implementing this are our deliberate effort to secure our British minority's right to have their traditional pubs; and to reserve places for pétanque playing in our parks in order to let the members of the French community maintain this part of their traditional life. A third example is the listing of some of the Roma population's traditional camping places as protected areas.

Important in this is the dialogue we have had with the heritage communities concerned, in line with the principles described in Article 7 of the Faro Convention.

When it comes to the connection between environment, heritage and quality of life described in Article 8, we have taken inspiration from the Norwegian Government's integrated approach. This means placing a responsibility on all ministries (within their

portfolios) and all sectors of society to protect and maintain the cultural heritage that is connected to their fields of work.

I thank you, my colleague ministers, for wholeheartedly accepting this challenge and for having implemented this principle through your work over the last five years. We have now established sectorial conservation plans for the monuments and heritage objects related to almost all fields of responsibility. Especially important has been the plan made by the ministry of defence, of course in co-operation with my own ministry, where we have made a conservation plan for a number of fortifications and installations that the changes in our military systems have made redundant. Some have been listed as protected monuments; others are sold to the private sector, but with clauses in the sale limiting the possibilities to make changes which might reduce their cultural heritage value.

The communications sector has undergone a severe restructuring, and this has necessitated similar plans for the railway and postal systems. A great achievement has been made by the ministry of religious affairs, which drew up an integrated plan for the conservation of churches, mosques, synagogues and other temples of sacred nature. This work has been the finest example of intercultural dialogue that Europe ever witnessed.

The combined efforts of the ministry of construction and the ministry of education in taking lessons from the traditional buildings in moving the building sector into more environment friendly ways of building techniques and securing the supply of craftsmen skilled in traditional methods have been astounding. This relates also to Article 9 concerning the sustainable use of the cultural heritage, where it is stated in paragraph (d), that one should promote the use of materials, techniques and skills based on tradition, and explore their potential for contemporary applications.

Last, but not least, I must underline the great challenge that is embedded in the necessary restructuring of our agriculture, and its effect on the change of our historical landscape. I cannot say that these difficulties are yet overcome, but I know that the minister for agriculture is well aware of the problems.

Concerning Article 10, I will only refer to our programme Creating New Assets in the Cultural Heritage Sphere. This is based on our political desire for the cultural heritage and the built environment to be used to a greater extent as resources in the development of thriving local communities, and as the basis for new economic activities.

We have a number of pilot projects that hopefully can create good models and examples of best practice to be followed by others. The programme is a co-operation between governmental agencies, regional and local authorities and private enterprise. So far the results are very promising. The challenge is to persuade others to take lessons from the experience already gained, and to really use the possibility for synergy between private and public money.

Article 11 deals with the organisation of public responsibilities for cultural heritage.

I will only make two points related to this.

The first is the success of our establishment of a Heritage Lottery Fund, of course inspired by the British one. In spite of the fact that our population is much smaller than that of Great Britain, and our average income somewhat lower, we have through this mechanism already been able to distribute important funding to our cultural heritage protection work. This has been important not least to compensate for many years of lack of maintenance of our built heritage. A regular maintenance approach is always the most sensible in terms of resources, be it money wise or in use of manpower.

The second point is the importance of the non-governmental organisations. We need them as constructive critics of our governmental policies, as well as partners in the concrete preservation work that needs to be done. I am therefore happy to look to the Council of Europe's Portorož Declaration for inspiration in our strengthening of the role of the NGOs.

We have supported an umbrella organisation for the increasing number of organisations emerging around specific fields of heritage interests and specific monuments.

The Government of Transbordania sees people's participation in democratically run NGOs as important for consolidating democracy as a governing principle in this country.

I can only say that for me and my administration the input from the NGOs has been very important and stimulating in our work on drawing up a heritage policy.

Let me conclude:

Transbordania as a country in transition has had to look for new inspiration. Through the Council of Europe and its network of heritage experts we have had easy access to examples of how other countries have tried to address different problems. As my presentation hopefully has shown, we have successfully made use of these examples in making our own heritage policy.

The recession starting in late 2008 gave us an opportunity to rethink and reflect. And I am grateful to you Mr Prime Minister, that you were able to see the broad perspective of the role of the cultural heritage in society. It has a potential for contributing to economic development, and not least a sound economic development that is based on real, not artificial values. We could call them basic values, both in material and spiritual terms.

Because, just as the economic perspectives are important, so is the role the cultural heritage plays in creating meaning in life. Meaning for us Transbordanians as citizens of this country, however diverse we are. Respecting the culture of others makes us more secure in our own different identities. Transbordania is, and shall remain, a home country for everybody who fully respects the other cultural communities living here.

Thank you fellow ministers, for your loyal contribution to the aims of the Faro Convention, taking action in your separate fields of responsibility, in order to implement the aims and goals of the Faro Convention. You have made Transborderia a model country in Europe, to which other countries now in their turn can look for inspiration and encouragement.

Let us propose to the Council of Europe that 27 October be declared an annual Faro Convention Day.