

**Local Award Ceremony for the Home for Cooperation  
Nicosia, Cyprus  
16 September 2014**

**Speech by Irina Subotic  
Vice-president of Europa Nostra**



***Excellencies, Honoured Guests,  
Dear Colleagues and Friends,***

It is such a pleasure to be here today, at the Home for Cooperation in the Buffer Zone of Nicosia, for the local ceremony of the well-deserved European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage / Europa Nostra Awards 2014.

This is a symbolic place standing for education, research, dialogue, and above all – cooperation across borders, across cultures and nations in order to celebrate both our individuality and our shared identity as Europeans.

This dream is very close to the heart of Europa Nostra, and I am honoured to be here today to celebrate the hard-work and dedication of the Association of Historical Dialogue and Research which has helped make it a reality.

The Home for Cooperation's building itself had long been facing neglect and deterioration. It was almost lost, if not for the dedicated people who restored it beautifully and converted it into the community centre you see today.

It is a symbol for the great things cooperation can achieve. It required people like you, people dedicated to creating a strong, unified community, where education, collaboration and the sharing of ideas are free to thrive. And above all - I must mention and thank cordially the political and financial support received, especially from the Norwegian government.

Please allow me to tell you a bit about Europa Nostra which celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year. As the leading European non-governmental organisation, we represent local, regional and national organisations in the field of cultural and natural heritage on the European Level.

We promote excellence and the power of example through our European Heritage Awards together with the European Union.

We raise our voice and campaign to save endangered heritage, in our 7 Most Endangered programme together with the European Investment Bank Institute: just to remind that this Buffer Zone of Nicosia was included on the first list of the 7 most endangered in 2013.

We lobby to put cultural heritage high on the agenda of Brussels and Strasbourg.

We represent over 250 non-governmental and non-profit heritage organisations from Portugal to Russia and from here in Cyprus all the way to Oslo, where Europa Nostra will hold the next European Heritage Congress in 2015. It is obvious that Norway plays an extremely important role in the activities concerning heritage protection in Europe.

Europa Nostra represents the Voice of Europe's Cultural heritage and our President probably has the best voice in the world: Maestro Plácido Domingo. We believe that culture and cultural heritage are vital ingredients for the cohesion and the stability of Europe's society, for the sustainability and prosperity of our economy - especially now in times of crisis, and for a better quality of life and living environment for all Europeans. No matter whether we have ancestors who have lived in Europe for centuries or whether we are "newcomers" to Europe. Cultural heritage belongs to all of us. And it is therefore our joint responsibility to take proper care of it. Only if Europeans of all generations and all backgrounds - ethnic, religious or social - work together can we make sure that our cultural and natural heritage stays vital and relevant and is safeguarded for future generations.

During our Annual congress in Vienna earlier this year, Commissioner Vassiliou and Plácido Domingo, our President, presented the awards to the 27 winners of the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage / Europa Nostra Awards - the Home for Cooperation among them.

So today we are here to celebrate this well-deserved award with all of you in Nicosia. Let me quote the Jury of the Awards:

*"The Jury felt that the Home for Cooperation was something to be really proud of. It constitutes, they felt, a substantial contribution to the revitalization of Nicosia's United Nations Buffer Zone as well as to the wider peacemaking procedure. Furthermore it represents a typical example of the 1950s architecture of Cyprus, which finds few supporters but which we are again starting to see as a brave and distinctive statement of the character of its period."*

The Home for Cooperation plays an active role in the community as a multi-functional educational centre, as well as a symbolic role, embodying the revitalisation of the United Nations Buffer Zone through a new era of collaboration and unity, and we honour the Association of Historical Dialogue and Research for their dedication to this cause.

We share with our Cypriot friends a common enthusiasm for learning from the best examples - as it has been demonstrated in this Buffer Zone. For allowing the "apple of discord to ferment into reconciliation" - to use the expression of our Executive President Denis de Kerkorlay, who had applied it in the case of Kosovo and Serbia relations concerning cultural heritage's contribution to peace. I am coming from Serbia and I am sure that it would be difficult to find people that could understand you better than we do.

The security challenges in old town Nicosia, a highly militarized area within the Venetian walls where the buffer zone is at its most narrow, need to be tackled. We reiterate our call upon both sides, including the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot mayors and municipalities of Nicosia, in addition to the Nicosia Master Plan, in

cooperation with UNFICYP and UNDP, to adopt a holistic approach to the urban infrastructure of the old town through joint projects that could attract investment and thereby transform the wider area. Such an approach would also contribute to the return of life to normal conditions in a manner that enhances security along the Green Line and promotes public confidence in the negotiations.

And, now, I would like to address few words to the Commissioner Androula Vassiliou, in the name of Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailović, our Secretary General, who is very sorry that some obligations prevented her of being with us this evening, and, naturally, in my personal name: we are extremely grateful for all that you have done for the cultural field, Mrs Vassiliou, particularly for your extremely important legacy concerning the document on the integrated approach to cultural heritage preservation, for being always with us when we were struggling to solve important questions on cultural heritage issues, for being our friend. We sincerely hope to continue our fruitful collaboration in the near future and we thank you warmly for everything you have done until now.

To finish with our laureates: Mutual respect is formed through mutual understanding, and that is the value of places like the Home for Cooperation. For making great strides towards peace, education and community revival, this place has been counted among prestigious circle of about 400 award winners who – during the past 12 years - have been selected by our Juries of experts as “the best of the best”. Once again, congratulations for this momentous achievement!

Thank you - *Evharisto poli*