

Speech: **European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage/Europa Nostra Awards
Local Award Ceremony for Home for Cooperation**
Nicosia, Cyprus – Tuesday, 16 September 2014, 19:00

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Distinguished guests,

Dear friends,

I am truly delighted - and deeply moved – to be standing before you here, in the buffer zone of Nicosia, celebrating the cultural heritage of my own country - and of Europe as a whole.

This is more than a building; it has become a 'home'. A home for people who appreciate our cultural heritage as part of our shared history as Europeans; who engage in critical thinking and are open to different points of view; and who are - or will become - the engaged citizens of Cyprus and of Europe.

We are standing tonight in front of the outcome of long years of work, personal investment and hope of a number of dedicated individuals. I particularly congratulate the members of the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research.

They had the great idea of creating a space for dialogue, cooperation and mutual understanding between our two communities – an idea which indeed 10 years ago was nothing short of revolutionary.

Tonight, thanks to hard work of many and the support of donors – whom I also congratulate - this idea has become a reality, one that will help and encourage our people to exchange views, share projects and sow the seeds of a better future.

Initiatives like the Home of Cooperation transcend the specific references of their locality. They essentially contribute – in a small but significant way - to Europe's deserved fame as a continent brimming with rich history and diverse culture – and as a continent of peace, dialogue and mutual trust.

The award that the "Home for co-operation" received in Vienna last May was based on these grounds. The Jury saw in this building not only 'a typical example of the 1950s architecture of Cyprus', but also 'a substantial contribution to the revitalization of Nicosia's UN Dead Zone as well as to the wider peace making process'.

The European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage – Europa Nostra Awards is the most prestigious prize in the cultural heritage sector in Europe. It singles out and rewards the most inspiring examples in heritage conservation, research, dedicated service or education, training and awareness-raising.

Cypriots should be proud that the Home for Cooperation is now among the awarded sites.

Placing value to our shared heritage as Europeans is all the more important as the European Union is striving to reconnect with its past, to link it to the present, and to project a dynamic vision for the future through a new narrative, a new way of engaging its citizens. Artists, intellectuals, scientists and citizens recently presented 'a New Narrative for Europe', a text, a manifesto stressing that Europe is a "state of mind", which each one of us can shape and advance. In this European story, cultural heritage – our culture, our traditions and beliefs - plays an essential role as the glue that keeps us 'united in diversity'.

Europe's heritage provides, so to speak, the missing link – for it creates a sense of belonging among and between European citizens.

Our heritage is forged not only across generations, but also across communities and territories – something that carries a very special significance for a country like Cyprus.

That is why the European Commission supports cultural heritage through its policies and programmes, such as Creative Europe; the EU Prize for cultural heritage/ Europa Nostra awards is just the tip of the iceberg.

Beyond this initiative, we are determined to strengthen our support for cultural heritage, because we know how valuable it is for Europe - at economic, social, and individual level. Culture heritage is a resource for the EU, an asset for all of us, and that also means that heritage is our collective responsibility.

This is why I launched last July an integrated heritage strategy for Europe, just as I did a couple of years ago for the cultural and creative sectors in general. Since the start of my mandate, I have felt the need for such a strategic approach in the field of heritage, and I am confident that this initiative will be supported by stakeholders across Europe.

I want to start a debate with the national administrations and authorities and the civil society about the best ways to improve how we work together to preserve and promote our heritage, in full respect of everyone's roles and responsibilities. I wish to encourage everybody to join this debate, joining Cyprus' voice to those of the other EU nations. I will not be the European Commissioner for Culture in a few months, but I will follow closely the European debate on heritage as a matter of personal conviction.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I started out by saying that the Home for Cooperation is more than just a 'building' or a 'house'. I will conclude by saying that it is also a bridge - a metaphorical but very real and, above all, a bridge of peaceful dialogue and cooperation among the two communities in Cyprus. I hope from the bottom of my heart that such bridges will lead us to a brighter future together.

Thank you for your attention.