

**Commissioner Androulla VASSILIOU**  
**Panel Discussion 'New Narrative for Europe**  
**and Cultural Heritage'**  
**Vienna, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2014**

**Speaking Points**

- Let me first welcome the text '*The mind and body of Europe*' adopted in Berlin following the initiative on a New Narrative for Europe. I am grateful to all those who have been involved in writing it including my good friend Sneška.
- I welcome in particular the strong references highlighting the role of cultural heritage has for Europe as a political body and a state of mind.
- **Heritage and culture are at the heart of the European project** – they always have been and they must remain so. It is a mistake to reduce the project of European integration to economics and politics only. Our '**unity in diversity**' is about what distinguishes and what brings us together and this is our history, our traditions, our values – in one word our shared cultural heritage.
- The New Narrative has given us the chance to reaffirm, loudly and clearly, that **Europe is above all a political and cultural project.**

- **This initiative is a starting point:** the beginning of a broad debate on the political vision of Europe and its future. This should be an inclusive debate where European citizens freely take part.
- **The current timing is critical.** The European elections, which will take the pulse of the electorate across the EU in a few weeks, have already brought forth political debates about Europe. At the same time, we are managing an economic crisis with social implications and a crisis of values which has put the European project to the test.
- The shaping of a new vision for Europe should not be left to technocrats or monopolised by professional politicians. There is a certain **fatigue with 'party politics'** in many EU countries.
- **Artists and culture professionals, intellectuals and writers can contribute to building up a very much needed European public space.** They must speak up and carry on a positive message about what Europe stands for and what culture can do for Europe.

- **Culture cannot solve all problems, but can certainly strengthen the social, inter-generational and territorial cohesion within Europe.** Cultural heritage is particularly valuable in that respect. At a moment where Europe is in search of a new narrative and vision, **our heritage reminds us who we are and where we should go as Europeans.**
- We must also **engage young people** – they are Europe's future. Our young people have no experience of war, but that doesn't mean that they have no experience of fear: fear of losing their job or staying unemployed. This uncertainty makes them vulnerable to delusion of politics, to populism and extremism. Many commentators speak of "a lost generation".
- We must place greater emphasis on those initiatives which touch young people's lives on a human level. We must develop policies which give opportunities.
- The policies under my responsibility (education, culture, youth, sport) lie at the heart of what one could call the **'human' and 'social' face of the European project.** I am happy to see them with a reinforced budget for the next seven years. However, we would need to see similar efforts in all EU countries and avoid drastic cuts on public budgets for education and culture that happen in many cases.

- **Any new narrative for Europe must be reaffirmed in terms of values.** Europe must be presented not simply as a financial construct, but as a way of life based on shared values such as commitment to freedom, democracy, tolerance and equality, fundamental rights and the rule of law.
- This is what the European model is about. Such a model can inspire faith. We have seen it recently in the case of Ukraine.
- We are embarking on a reflection process about Europe - which is much needed. I am sure the New Narrative initiative will rightly do that. It is of course our shared responsibility to go beyond rhetoric and ensure the means for our joint action for Europe.
- We need to place culture and heritage at the heart of the political agenda for Europe. Those present in this room may be convinced of their value, but this is not generally the case. I was struck, for instance, by the fact that, thus far, culture and the values it embodies did not feature at all in the political debates on the European elections and the future orientations of the EU.

I would not argue that the economy and the crisis, social issues like migration or geopolitical questions (Ukraine, energy) are not central, but I would like to see **culture as an integral part of the political debate for the future of the EU**. In my eyes, this is fundamental if we wish to pursue an equitable, democratic and solidary European Union.