

Second meeting of the expert group on cultural heritage

**Welcome address by Mariya Gabriel,
Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture , Education and Youth**

9 June 2020

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Dear Members of the Expert Group,

Ladies and Gentleman,

I am very pleased to open the second meeting of this expert group on cultural heritage.

I welcome all the participants: the Members of the European Parliament, Ms Melbarde and Ms Sojdrova, civil society representatives, experts from EU Member States, international organisations and the European Committee of the Regions.

A very special welcome goes to the experts from the Western Balkan countries whom I have invited to join this group. I think you all agree that Europe's shared cultural heritage does not stop at EU borders.

We are all gathered here today because we believe that cultural heritage is important. Because we believe it should be safeguarded. Because we believe it should be promoted.

Cultural heritage represents our history and our identity. A bridge that connects our past, our present, and our future.

It belongs to all of us. It is part of who we are. It is also, let us not forget it, a great source of jobs and revenues for local economies, via the development of tourism.

Our European Cultural Heritage is unique and should make us proud. Without it, we would not have a European Union. Cultural Heritage is Europe's soul and values – and this includes the Western Balkan region.

For this reason, it needs to be protected, because once it is gone, it is gone forever.

I am convinced that such a feeling is shared among all of us. It is what brings us together here today.

The support we should give to the sector should be more decisive now, following the Covid-19 outbreak that has had a devastating impact on cultural heritage.

My view is that cultural heritage is an essential ingredient for Europe's recovery. Cultural heritage makes people resilient, stronger and happier – as simple as that. Whether in Italy, Croatia or in Albania, it must be safeguarded for future generations. This is why I welcome the adoption of the Council Conclusions on risk management for cultural heritage, promoted by the Croatian Presidency.

Today, also thanks to your work, we are presenting a mapping of relevant expert networks and instruments at EU level that can be activated in case of heritage emergency.

Such an instrument can be very useful, as it makes us better equipped to face disasters occurring to our cultural heritage. I invite you to share it with relevant actors in your countries and communities.

Beyond this, the question is how to safeguard and promote Cultural Heritage?

For this, we have to use the instruments at our disposal, both sector-specific and horizontal.

Here I think about the traditional ones such as Erasmus+ and Creative Europe of course.

But also other instruments like Horizon 2020, and its successor Horizon Europe, especially as a new Cluster dedicated to culture will be created, as well as a new KIC managed by the EIT. The Digital Europe Programme

also for instance, which supports a data space for cultural heritage linked to Europeana. Without forgetting the cohesion funds.

It will be important to look at the synergies among these funding instruments.

However, we also need to look beyond these traditional tools.

Two weeks ago, we presented a proposal for a major recovery plan, with a new instrument, as well as targeted reinforcements to the long-term EU budget for 2021-2027.

Under the package, some new instruments will need to be used.

The new REACT-EU initiative will provide a top-up for cohesion support to Member States, with a budget of €55 billion. The money will focus on SMEs vital priorities: employment subsidies, short-term work schemes, liquidity and solvency for SMEs, including cultural heritage.

Moreover, a reinforced InvestEU bringing together all EU financial instruments to boost investment, innovation and job creation in the Cultural and Creative ecosystem.

Beyond these, there is a need to mainstream cultural heritage in major EU policies. This will be one of the questions you will discuss during the workshop today: the contribution of cultural heritage to the Green Deal agenda. I fully share your view on the link between the two.

Finally, let me mention another crucial topic: Tourism.

Last month we presented a recovery plan for the tourism sector and cultural tourism, that represents 40% of European tourism, is well covered.

To invite Europeans to enjoy again visits to museums and heritage sites in their surroundings, I will launch a social media campaign *'Europe's close to you - This summer, I visit Europe'*, encouraging people to re-discover Europe's manifold treasures, be they natural or cultural.

This will benefit both: cultural heritage can help promoting the tourism season, at the same time; tourism can help in the relaunch of cultural heritage sites.

The objective will also be to promote a more sustainable, local cultural tourism.

I count on all of you to help us in the dissemination of the campaign and to propose sites to be included in the campaign.

Since I took office, I made it very clear that safeguarding and promoting Europe's cultural heritage is one of my priorities.

This is our common task. This Group, representing the member states, the sector, the civil society, European institutions, and international organisations is therefore very important.

I really count on your work, ideas, proposals, because we share the same objective.

To support better information flows and sharing of practices, I introduced an on-line platform that facilitates a continuous dialogue among relevant authorities in the Member States. In parallel, I initiated a new Platform "for the sector and by the sector" entitled 'Creatives Unite'. It gathers in a single space all initiatives by cultural and creative sectors in response to the COVID19. I invite those of you who did not yet have a chance to use the platform to join and contribute your ideas and projects.

A videoconference through the platform will be organised on 26 June. I invite all of you to attend.

Cultural heritage is present at every stage; this means that all actors should be involved, including the regions. For this reason after a discussion with the President of the Committee of the Regions, I have decided to have a common action plan, which should also benefit cultural heritage.

I seize the presence of Ms Melbarde to thank her for her work on the ongoing report on achieving an effective policy legacy for the European Year of Cultural Heritage. I look forward to the adoption of the report to improve some of our actions.

Together we want to build on the important achievements of the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

For this reason, I propose that this Group meets more regularly, on a three to four months basis.

I wish you an excellent meeting and I look forward to its conclusions.

Thank you.