

**Opening Remarks
Cultural Heritage Summit – Welcome session
Berlin, 22 June 2018
- Check against delivery -**

Excellencies,

distinguished guests,

ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to Berlin and to this Summit. It is fantastic to see so many high level speakers and delegates from across Europe and further afield.

Thank you all for being here. I would like to thank the German Cultural Heritage Committee, the Prussian Heritage Foundation and Europa Nostra for organising this wonderful event. These three organisations really are the driving force behind this first truly European Summit on cultural heritage; and they are committed and strong partners for the entire European Year of Cultural Heritage.

I am glad that we have this occasion to discuss and debate the value of cultural heritage in today's Europe. And there is much to be proud of. Culture and cultural heritage are at the top of the European political agenda. At the Gothenburg Summit in November last year and again at the European Council in December, EU Leaders recognised and underlined how

important culture is in boosting innovation, economic growth and competitiveness. And they rightly stressed the critical role it plays in strengthening a sense of European identity, in building a resilient, cohesive and fair Europe for the future.

This is the context in which we launched the European Year of Cultural Heritage. So far 2,560 events have been organised across EU Member States, involving a million people. The most active countries are Ireland, Germany and Portugal, with more than 700 events each – and this is only for the first quarter of 2018! There is a lot more to come. For example, Germany, our host country, is calling for all churches and cities in Europe to ring their bells in unison on 21 September to celebrate the International Day of Peace. I hope everyone will join in.

I am pleased that we are also managing to reach out to young people – and to people from many diverse backgrounds. This is a priority for me. Part of this effort is a great new online resource developed by the European Commission's in-house knowledge and science service, the Joint Research Centre. It is my pleasure to launch today the cultural heritage story maps.

In that very spirit of *sharing heritage*, this interactive website is now available for everybody and can be found through the page of the European Year. It collates a vast array of cultural heritage initiatives supported by the EU. These maps include for example the European Capitals of Culture, sites rewarded with the European Heritage label and the Cultural Routes

recognised as significant by the Council of Europe. They will also link to DiscoverEU, a new initiative that offers young people turning 18 the opportunity to travel and explore our continent's rich cultural heritage, meet new people, learn from other cultures and discover what it feels to be European.

With its state-of-the-art technologies and exploratory research, the Commission's Joint Research Centre also works to *protect* and *preserve* cultural heritage, in that way giving a practical, scientific dimension to the slogan of the European Year – 'Cultural heritage: where the past meets the future'.

It does so for instance with an advanced mobile laser scanning device that allows to develop 3D maps. This tool, which comes in a handy backpack, makes it possible for example to better visualise damaged historical buildings and based on that, find solutions for their restoration. You will be able to experience for yourselves how this works in a brief live demonstration outside this room just after the first session.

Ladies and gentlemen,

EU Leaders' call for more ambition as well as the European Year of Cultural Heritage have created a unique momentum. The challenge now is to use this momentum and ensure that culture and cultural heritage continue to receive the recognition and financial resources they clearly deserve. We can only

achieve this together. Indeed, this Summit is part of this joint ambition.

The European Commission has been laying the foundations. Exactly one month ago, I presented a new European Agenda for Culture. Its central aim is to harness the power of culture and cultural diversity to drive economic and social development and build stronger relations with countries across the world. Based on lessons learnt over the last decade, the New Agenda will be implemented working closely with Member States, stakeholders across civil society and business, and international partners.

In the Agenda, we also announced an Action Plan for Cultural Heritage which I intend to present towards the end of the year. You can expect this Action Plan to cover many facets related to protecting and promoting cultural heritage.

For example, we will continue to support youth volunteering in the field of cultural heritage, notably through the European Solidarity Corps.

We are also envisaging offering regional and local officials fresh opportunities to learn from each other on heritage related issues. This could include sharing experiences on how to implement standards for sustainable cultural tourism; or success stories related to re-using cultural heritage for urban

regeneration. And we will support further research on cultural heritage.

Member States will also be invited to develop similar plans at national level and follow up through the Council Work Plans for Culture.

Those action plans cannot be conceived and implemented without cultural heritage and civil society organisations, and this is why this Summit is so important. I very much look forward to the exchanges today, and to the resulting 'Berlin call'.

Big ambitions need to be backed by sufficient funding. That is why I am proud that the recent Commission proposals for the next EU budget after 2020 envisage reinforced support for the cultural and creative sectors. Creative Europe, the EU's funding programme for these sectors, is presented as a standalone programme with an overall budget of EUR 1.85 billion. This would amount to a 25% increase compared to the current budget. I count on all of you to help us defend this proposal in the tough negotiations ahead.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I hope you all share my determination to use this European Year to show how crucial it is to keep cultural heritage at the heart of our Union's political priorities.

This is why we are here today, and what better place than Berlin to host this event? This city has stood witness to people

from all walks of life using the power of culture to overcome division and heal the wounds caused by the Cold War. The Berlin Wall, like the entire Iron Curtain, physically, mentally and culturally split our continent and separated neighbours, friends and families for decades. My own life has been deeply affected by this division.

And yet, what happened in autumn 1989 made it plain to see: our shared culture and history was stronger than any attempt to tear Europe apart. It showed that our shared heritage is intrinsically linked to our shared values, to who we are and how we define ourselves.

Today, as new divisions open up within our communities and, I am sad to say, between Eastern and Western Europe, we more than ever need to remember the unique power of culture. The power to bring us together, help us learn about each other – and ourselves. The power to open our eyes and hearts to allow us to understand and accept our differences – and what we have in common.

This force has always been at the heart of the European project. Now that this is once again widely recognised, we have a wonderful opportunity to make full use of it. To move closer to each other, and to build a better future. Let us seize the moment.

Thank you.