

**Speech by the Norwegian Minister of the Environment
Bård Vegard Solhjell, EHHF dinner, Akershus Castle May 23rd 2013.**

Dear European Heritage Heads and delegates, honoured ambassadors and invited guests.

I am honoured to receive you for this important meeting in Oslo. I am also very pleased to wish you welcome to the old castle of Akershus. As host and as the minister responsible for the physical cultural heritage in Norway, I could not find a better setting for a dinner with our European colleagues than this significant medieval site in Norway and Oslo. Norway is most famous for its Viking ships and stave churches, but we also have some castles, though not as many or as big as you have in Europe. We are a small country with small castles.

You might not be used to being addressed by a Minister of the Environment. Normally, I understand, cultural heritage is a responsibility under the Minister of Culture. Well, we Norwegians sometimes tend to do things a bit differently.

We consider cultural heritage and cultural environment as important environmental resources. Cultural heritage was included in the Ministry's portfolio when it was established in 1972. We saw it as a great advantage to assemble the management for both nature and cultural heritage, and to handle these two sectors as equal parts in all planning processes. Cultural heritage is now an integral part of the Norwegian environmental policy.

Another vital principle is the sector responsibility. Each sector and its Ministry has an independent responsibility for the management of cultural heritage in their field, such as (they have) for environmental aspects in general. The Ministry of Transport is responsible for the cultural heritage connected to the transport infrastructure, like railways, stations as well as historic roads. The Health is sector responsible for hospitals, the Defence sector for fortresses etc. Every sector is also instructed to elaborate national protection plans for state-owned properties of cultural significance.

We consider cultural heritage and cultural environments as environmental resources. The heritage sector has an important role in social development projects. Increased urbanization demands a policy for a successful urban development; it demands a political will to safeguard the cultural heritage resources and to exploit the potential they represent.

Eight Norwegian Ministries have now joined forces to elaborate a strategy for the creation of new assets/local development based on natural and cultural environment.

Norway is active in the development of an updated cultural heritage policy in the EU. We find the development in the EU, reported this morning, encouraging. For ten years Norway has been a 'driver' in the work to identify and influence the EU legislation that, inadvertently, causes unnecessary challenges for the preservation of Europe's cultural heritage. One example is the prohibition on sale of wood tar because of possible negative health effects. Wood tar is very important for the preservation of stave churches and medieval houses.

In 2005 a Nordic research project was initiated, co-financed by Finland, Norway and Sweden. The result was that there were found no negative health effects of wood tar when used on wood. Consequently, in 2007; wood tar is no longer forbidden. That was good news for the Norwegian cultural heritage.

In the years to come Norway will continue to invest in European cooperation in this field.

I think the European Heritage Heads Forum can play an important role in learning from each other's best practice. This is an important task. We all have common interests in a number of policy matters, independent of our national borders, and it is important that we unite our efforts on a European basis.

Tomorrow the topic for your meeting is the role of the voluntary associations - NGOs - in the heritage field. The voluntary organizations and other private actors play an important role in the safeguarding of our cultural heritage. A good collaboration between the public authorities and the voluntary associations and private owners is the best guarantee we have for the continued care of our cultural heritage.

Our society is changing, and many of the changes are common throughout Europe: Immigration; migration from rural areas to the central cities; the closing down of old industries and the creation of new; and global warming - all these represent changes that the cultural heritage management should adapt to.

We believe the last convention from the Council of Europe, the Convention on the role of the cultural heritage for the society (the Faro Convention) takes into account the new challenges of our time and is forward-looking: It stresses the need to see the cultural and natural heritage in context, and it establishes the right of peoples to determine their own cultural heritage. Society, represented by NGOs and ad-hoc support groups, must be actively involved in the cultural heritage management.

I therefore wish for a constructive session on this topic tomorrow and I hope that you may come to agreement on a broad European strategy for an improved cooperation between the public and private sectors in the near future.

But first, I hope we all will enjoy a pleasant dinner based on the best raw materials from the Norwegian nature, based on traditions but developed for the modern Norwegian 'cuisine'. This is a heritage we both can be proud of and see as one example of creating assets based on heritage.