

MEETING OF SENIOR OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR HERITAGE
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The Council of Europe greatly appreciates the invitation to take part in this meeting of the European countries' senior officials responsible for heritage. I am pleased to be representing our Organisation here this morning. I should like to speak briefly about two points:

- firstly, to highlight the specific features of the Council of Europe's work on heritage;
- and secondly, to say a few words about the HEREIN system – the European heritage network –, a common working instrument with considerable potential for future European co-operation.

The Council of Europe's aims

As soon as it took its first initiatives in the heritage sphere in the 1970s, the Council of Europe (CoE) positioned itself in the specific area that makes its work so distinctive. It has set up a forum for exchange, discussion, methodological progress and innovation now covering about 50 countries. The approach chosen is directly linked to the CoE's basic aims. The Council is neither an academic research institution, nor a professional organisation, nor a cultural enterprise. It is a regional and political governmental organisation whose priorities are set by its Statute and by periodic summits of heads of state and government. It deals with the problems facing society and manages multilateral co-operation, through which it seeks the best ways to resolve them. The Warsaw Summit in May 2005 confirmed the Organisation's basic tasks,

which are to uphold human rights (the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg is emblematic in this respect), promote the rule of law and apply democratic principles. Culture and heritage are included in the summit's action plan through the objective of building "more humane and inclusive" societies, which implies preserving cultural diversity and promoting intercultural dialogue.

In short, whereas Unesco has developed a system for protecting the world heritage and singled out humanity's major heritage assets, the CoE has aimed to treat heritage as part of the citizens' living environment and, more recently, as a vehicle for social ties and a factor for cohesion in the process of building European citizenship.

Our contribution may be summed up as follows.

The Council of Europe's initiatives in favour of Europe's cultural heritage

Several aspects come to mind at once.

1. The first feature of the Council's action is that it has kept abreast of developments and of changes in society and people's thinking, and has sometimes even anticipated events.

- In 1975 the CoE launched the concept of integrated conservation, which was designed to develop a more humane and more quality-oriented form of town planning than that reflected in the reconstruction of the post-war years. This theme still underlies the CoE's current work in

south-east Europe (the Balkans) and the South Caucasus, which aims to introduce intersectoral heritage policies combining several sectors ranging from spatial planning to economics and from tourism to cultural development. However, the concept of heritage has been broadened to include that of cultural or historical environment, then that of landscape, which covers the territory as a whole. The co-operation undertaken has yielded practical results: for example, the Valletta Convention on the archaeological heritage, designed as a response to the pressure of major public works (such as motorways, car parks and gas pipelines), has led to the adoption or amendment of legislation in the countries concerned.

- With the drafting of the Faro Framework Convention on the value of heritage for society, which was opened for signature in October 2005, the Council of Europe is pursuing its pioneering work, this time responding to the effects of globalisation and the political tensions and conflicts that followed the collapse of the Berlin Wall in some parts of Europe. In a changing society marked by movement and migration, which inevitably differs from stable and compartmentalised societies in terms of the relationship between population and territory, our approach to heritage and our discourse on the subject must obviously take account of new sociological realities. We must consider not only how the migrant groups crammed into large conurbations view their heritage, but also how the “Erasmus” and “Tempus” generations, these new Europeans who often study, live, work and reproduce elsewhere than in the place where they were born, will approach heritage. Because of its ethical and social aims, the CoE is the organisation best suited to putting these trends into perspective.

- In this sense, the countries concerned save time and energy by using the CoE working environment, even if they need to adjust or alter it, and this means that there is no need to devise a new structure, disregarding the achievements so far.

2. The second feature of the CoE's activity is that it transforms independent work by experts into common international reference instruments and politically and/or legally recognised standards. These are Committee of Ministers recommendations to member states, which act as incentives, and of course international conventions which take precedence over domestic law. A whole series of non-binding guidelines also deal with specific or technical aspects of heritage policies, providing public authorities and professionals with reference points. There are many examples of these. The exchange of best practices, or benchmarking, generated by such co-operation obviously lies at the heart of the Organisation's work.

3. The third feature of the CoE's work is that it offers a mechanism for the organised monitoring of its initiatives through the use of the HEREIN system, which was set up with financial assistance from the European Union. On 14 and 15 May 2007, the discussions of the Steering Committee for Cultural Heritage, which brings together senior cultural heritage officials or their representatives each year, will place the accent on the practical organisation of "soft" monitoring of the CoE's heritage conventions, starting with the Valletta Convention on the protection of the archaeological heritage. The idea will be to consider the adjustments to be made to the heritage policies database available on HEREIN and the testing of additional modules on the archaeological heritage. Gradually, the soft monitoring approach should of course extend to sectors other than archaeology, such as the built environment, landscape and,

above all, heritage interpretation and education, which have a significant impact in terms of the CoE's political priorities, relations between population groups, conflict prevention and cohesion in the broadest sense. It should be pointed out here that as early as 1989 the CoE initiated European co-operation on heritage education, which resulted in a number of fruitful programmes; a review of those programmes is being published this year in English and Italian. Looking ahead to 2008, the year of intercultural dialogue, it is time to reactivate that approach and perhaps also to give fresh impetus and meaning to the European Heritage Days, a joint activity run by the CoE and the European Union.

With a few slides, I shall now try to give you an idea of the HEREIN mechanism and its potential.