

**Welcoming speech Director-General Culture and Media, Mrs. Judith van Kranendonk, on behalf of the State Secretary of Culture, Mr. Halbe Zijlstra, EHHF-bijeenkomst, 25 May 2011 in the Royal Palace, Amsterdam.**

Ladies and gentlemen, dear members of the European Heritage Heads Forum,

Welcome to Amsterdam, one of the most special capitals of Europe. Especially welcome to the Royal Palace on Dam Square, an architectural icon of the Dutch Golden Age. This spectacular building has often been called the '8th wonder of the world'. More important, it shows the universe in all its iconographic splendour. It pays a tribute to the world.

As true Europeans, you will probably like to know that this building has unmistakable links with our common European history. On the tympanum in the facade for example, the virgin of the city of Amsterdam wears a crown. This crown that was a gift of the Austrian emperor Maximilian in the sixteenth century. And also France has left footsteps and fingerprints in this palace. It was king Louis Napoleon who made this town hall into a palace in the early nineteenth century.

Since 1813 the Orange monarchy settled in the palace. Our Queen Beatrix receives foreign guests here; her mother Queen Juliana abdicated in this palace and it is often used by the Royal Family for official engagements.

We are standing on Dam Square, a special place. In earlier times freighters sailed up the rivers and moored just around the corner and loaded and unloaded their cargo. Also Rembrandt crossed the dam square to buy his paint. And criminals were executed publicly here. Big masses demonstrated for their own interests. And most importantly the Queen officially lays a wreath on the 4th of May at the National Freedom Monument. A monument recently restored with help of German experts. All these European influences and expertise are proof of our international nature and openness.

The Palace is situated right in the middle of old Amsterdam. It is one of the few detached buildings in the historical centre. Right behind us, you will find the famous Canal Zone. An unique urban concept dating from the seventeenth century. It was listed last year by UNESCO as world heritage, because of its world-class values. We are proud of what we call the 'Grachtengordel'. Tomorrow, you will cruise these canals and hopefully will enjoy the richness of the lovely mansions on every side.

From every corner of Europe, you have entered the Netherlands. 26 countries are present tonight, plus a representative of the Council of Europe. I am impressed by that result. It stresses the strength of the 'unity by diversity'. And without doubt it proofs that this forum is appreciated as the only informal network for director-generals and directors of state heritage agencies. Through this network you inform and inspire one another about the recent developments on heritage management in Europe. And you are willing to learn from each other.

Till the present day, the role of the citizen in our society is of great importance.

From that respect, our State Secretary of Culture is a follower of the idea of more responsibility for the citizen. And consequently, less involvement by the government. Our Monument Act works that way already since 1988: the State provides advice, but the local authorities are responsible for the enforcement of the Law. The shift in responsibilities is a hot item. Since last year also nature and landscape are linked to our provinces.

Our government has a drive to act strong, efficient and customer-friendly. In other words: a compact government. But this also means tough budget cuts in order to create a cheaper and more flexible state organisation.

One of the ways to realise this is by stimulating cultural entrepreneurship and participation of the general public. Above that, subsidies are linked to social achievements more and more and market economy gets priority over state subsidies.

You all know that monument care and craftsmanship go hand-in-hand. Look at the restoration of this building. We cannot work without sufficient knowledge of for example materials. Keeping up high standards of quality in Europe is essential. It is crucial for the maintenance of our heritage. Cultural heritage contributes to economic growth, enriches our lives and improves the surroundings we live in.

Finally, I would like to mention one European project: *Europeana*. The Netherlands is expecting a lot from this project and has contributed substantially. About 1500 European organisations are participating already. Through these collections we can determine the history of Europe – from Antiquity till modern times. Definitely digitisation helps us to maintain these precious materials and make them more accessible. Therefore I call on all the countries involved to make *Europeana* an even bigger success.

Ladies and gentlemen,

On the agenda of this years forum is the theme: *Changes in rural heritage*. It is a topic that all countries in Europe in one way or the other are effected by. The theme is well chosen and I hope there will be interesting discussions.

Have a pleasant stay in Amsterdam.

Thank you very much.