



BELGIAN CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

6TH CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE (22-24 APRIL 2015)

“Cultural heritage in the 21st century for living better together. Towards a common strategy for Europe”

The Conference aims to establish the conditions for developing a **European heritage strategy**. These conditions involve, in particular, the confirmation of the Council of Europe's historical role as a forum bringing together all the parties who are able to contribute to this ambitious common reflection.

The introduction of a **European heritage strategy** is more essential than ever and is intended to mark a new stage in the process managed by the Council of Europe for a number of decades, with a view to offering a specific response to current-day challenges in the heritage field, namely:

- The implementation of "good governance" founded on participatory mechanisms permitting citizens to assume an active role in heritage identification and management;
- The adoption of innovative approaches to improving people's living environment and quality of life, founded on local cultural resources and the common good.

A **European heritage strategy** must ultimately help put in place a society which defends and asserts the fundamental European values: human rights, the rule of law and democracy. These values are citizen-focused and cultivate a spirit of mutual respect and of recognition of each person's singularities. They thus help to build a more inclusive, more cohesive society which promotes public well-being as an expression of human rights.

The conference will also constitute an opportunity to lay down guidelines concerning the **themes**, the operational **priorities** and the key **tools** to be implemented by the member States under this strategy.

CONTEXT

Over more than forty years the Council of Europe has developed a significant body of regulations, which has played a vital role in consolidating and harmonising national heritage policies. These regulations made it possible to save the European heritage from the planned destruction inherent in the major investment policies which were implemented after the Second World War thanks to the strong economic growth which Europe experienced during that period. The Council of Europe has promoted key concepts such as "integrated conservation" (with the Amsterdam Charter and the Granada Convention) or the role of heritage for society (the Faro Convention). This acquis retains its legitimacy, but the aim is to recontextualise it in a European heritage strategy which will also address new challenges.

Today it is necessary to build on these achievements and to resituate these instruments in the light of the challenges facing our modern-day societies. It is politically and ethically indispensable to conceive a less academic heritage approach, focusing more on citizens who must be able to participate in improving their surroundings and their well-being. There is a demand for this within our societies, while at the same time the cultural, social and economic crises in Europe are highlighting that people are adrift and have lost their bearings, that our values are being questioned and that our European project is under threat.

Heritage not only conveys notions of respect, diversity and multi-culturalism, but is also a fertile ground for refounding societies based on their multiple identities, giving them a fresh impetus drawing on their diverse origins, and enhancing participatory governance, which fosters civic engagement as a potential means of supporting public action and making institutions more effective and transparent. The heritage process also promotes a form of economic development that relies on local resources and local intelligence so as to stimulate innovation, growth and job preservation and creation. Our heritage is indeed a unique, non-renewable **resource** which cannot be relocated and is common to the entire European continent.

An awareness of our common heritage, which conveys a collective narrative, can serve to build a cohesive society founded on diversity, recognised as a source of wealth.

PREPARATION AND FOLLOW-UP

The preparations for the Conference of Ministers responsible for Heritage, to be held in Namur from 22 to 24 April 2015 in the context of the Belgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, draw on the work of the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape, and add a further dimension to the recent European Union documents emphasising the importance of heritage for the EU's sectoral policies.

The conclusions of the Conference will permit the Committee of Ministers to agree on the principle of a **European heritage strategy** and entrust the Council of Europe with the task of co-ordinating the strategy development process and creating European synergies, notably in respect of the new European Heritage Year, which has been announced forty years after the one held under the aegis of the Council of Europe in 1975.