

**Current Affairs Committee Meeting, 39th Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities – Remote meeting, 16 September 2020**

## Speech Barbara TOCE, Italy (SOC/G/PD)

*Check against delivery - Seul le prononcé fait foi*

**Report “ Culture without borders: Cultural heritage management for local and regional development [CG-CUR(2020)15-03]”**

**Remote meeting, 16 September 2020**

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start my words with thanking all those who contributed to this report:

First of all, to Professor Maria GRAVARI-BARBAS, our expert, who has done a remarkable job and we have learned a lot from her;

and to all our discussion partners who participated in the Reflection Group who helped improve the report. Colleagues,

In its priorities for 2017-2020, the Congress talked about its intention to promote intercultural dialogue and to preserve cultural heritage at local and regional level.

Our Committee has contributed to cultural issues with various resolutions in the past such as the Resolution on “Intercultural and inter-faith dialogue and the Resolution on Jewish Cemeteries that calls on local authorities to protect, preserve and maintain burial sites.

In this new report, we want to highlight the important role and responsibility of local and regional authorities in the overall management of cultural heritage.

One of the reasons I was motivated to propose this report last year was the idea of creating connections between cultures or, rather, getting rid of borders between cultures. Cultural heritage can help us recognise and promote the values that we have in common: democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

First of all, with this report we invite local and regional authorities to look at cultural heritage through a new lens.

The focus is on the understanding of cultural heritage as both tangible objects on the one hand, and as intangible practices, knowledge and experience on the other.

Cultural heritage management is not only about preserving the material assets of our societies. It must also be a tool for improving social cohesion and intercultural dialogue.

Once we change our way of looking at it, we start looking beyond objects, at people and how they connect to history and to each other.

Secondly, in the report, we look at cultural heritage as a tool for local and regional sustainable socio-economic development.

Cultural heritage is a powerful engine of economic growth. It offers many opportunities for local and regional development.

The dangers of over-tourism are real but if we can manage to do it in a sustainable way, cultural tourism can generate multiple sources of income, both for urban centres and rural communities.

It can also be a means for local and regional authorities to strengthen social cohesion, reach out to disconnected communities and foster inter-cultural dialogue.

Exploring shared history and roots can help bring people with different outlooks and help diffuse conflicts.

Thirdly, we underline the obstacles to enjoying the full benefit of cultural heritage. One of these obstacles is a lack of tools for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage and a lack of inclusive governance schemes.

In order to overcome the obstacles, local and regional authorities must continue to invest in cultural heritage by identifying emerging problems and developing new tools to address them.

They need to get more data and indicators on the benefits of cultural heritage as well as further study on responsible tourism.

They also need studies and analyses to improve their knowledge base, networking and policy making. We emphasise here the importance of making cultural heritage management an inclusive one. The report contains many examples of good practices which can serve as inspiration.

To conclude, I would like to say that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a serious impact on cultural heritage.

To be successful with the policies we discuss, it is necessary to call on the international community to reinvest in international cooperation, dialogue and a sense of belonging.

Ernesto Ottone, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Culture, reminded everyone, and I quote, that "today, more than ever, people need culture. Culture makes us resilient. It gives us hope. It reminds us that we are not alone."

Dear colleagues,

I now leave the floor to my co-rapporteur, Mrs Rena DOUROU, to present the resolution and recommendation in detail. Thank you for your attention.