

**Conference of Ministers of Culture „Creating our future: creativity and cultural heritage as strategic resources for a diverse and democratic Europe” – Strasbourg, France, 1 April 2022**

## Speech by Barbara TOCE (Italy, SOC), Congress Rapporteur on Cultural Heritage Management

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*530 words = 4 minutes*

Minister Fanceschini,  
Secretary General,  
Ministers of Culture,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Congress Rapporteur on Cultural Heritage, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

I am honoured to share this moment with all of you, who are convinced of the unique capacity of cultural heritage to nurture diverse, prosperous communities.

At the Congress, we fully share this conviction. In my recent report, called “Culture without borders”, the Congress highlighted how cultural heritage can help build bridges between peoples and communities.

We underline that sustainable cultural heritage management can bring Europeans together, while still celebrating their diversity.

Our rich and diverse cultural heritage can help us understand and promote the values that are so vital for democracy: solidarity, dialogue, acceptance of each other and respect for human rights and rule of law.

This Congress report gives municipalities and regions the tools to play their part in developing such sustainable management, for example by protecting intangible cultural heritage and working to prevent over-tourism.

However, we cannot take our cultural heritage for granted. We need to protect it in all its diversity, especially in times of crisis.

For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a serious impact on cultural heritage and events.

Without visitors, there is little income to maintain cultural sites in our towns and cities. Traditional festivals, regional music and local customs have been put on hold and the revival will not always be easy.

This lack of cultural activities impacted our citizens at many levels. As Ernesto Ottone from UNESCO said: "today, more than ever, people need culture. Culture makes us resilient. It gives us hope. It reminds us that we are not alone."

I also want to express my grave worry about the destruction of cultural heritage in Ukraine. City centers, musea and cultural sites risk being damaged or lost.

With large parts of the population having to flee and being separated from their communities, war is also a threat to intangible heritage such as local customs and minority languages.

We need to support local communities in the preservation of their cultural heritage, especially in times of crisis, displacement and war.

To conclude, I would like to stress two aspects of the Congress report, that are especially relevant today.

Firstly, the report highlights that through cultural heritage, we can explore shared history and roots, bringing together people with different outlooks and helping diffuse conflicts.

Secondly, it calls on cities and regions to use cultural heritage management as a tool for urban regeneration and to achieve territorial justice.

As such, cultural heritage is one tool to help us rebuild after crises and conflict. To be successful, local and regional authorities have a crucial role to play. We are the first line of defense for our cultural heritage.

However, we need the support and commitment of our central governments in this. Together, we will need to reinvest in international cooperation, dialogue and a sense of belonging.

We will need to develop sustainable and inclusive cultural heritage management at all levels and from the bottom up.

I hope that Europe's cities and regions can count on your support, as Ministers of Culture, in moving our cultural heritage forward.

Thank you.