Council of Europe Museum Prize Ceremony

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Speech by Theodoros Rousopoulos
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to open this ceremony on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which gives the Museum Prize Award - the Council of Europe Museum Prize - in partnership with the European Museum Forum.

Dear colleagues, we pay tribute to this successful partnership, which is strongly carried by the succeeding European Museum Forum Presidents and highly competent, committed and enthusiastic judges.

I wish to thank the European Museum Forum and Mr Hans LOOIJEN, Chairperson ad interim of the Board of Trustees - who is with us today – for the longstanding partnership that we have established for this Prize, which is a key component of the wider European Museum of the Year Award scheme.

Back in 1977, the Parliamentary Assembly recognised the important role of museums acting as a resource for human development and citizen engagement. The geographical area for the scheme was, from the outset, that of the European Cultural Convention and the aim of the scheme was to stimulate the international exchange of ideas and to create networks of inspiration.

Over the years the award scheme has observed dramatic changes in the European museum landscape – both quantitative, involving a rapid growth in the number of museums, and qualitative, affecting how museums operate and how they are perceived.

Today the main awards reflect the challenges, obligations, and opportunities which museums face in the 21st century. They carry the values that we cannot take for granted and that we must continue to defend, especially when democracies are backsliding and when divisions and conflicts within societies are increasing.

In this context, I also wish to pay tribute to our Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media that makes the final decision to select the winner each year. As a former member of this Committee, I am particularly attached to the fundamental values promoted by the Prize, and I am thankful to Mr Constantinos Efstathiou who represented the Assembly in the preselection stages of the jury for this year.

The key criteria for the Council of Europe Museum Prize, which a museum candidate should aim to fulfil, include, inter alia:
- To promote respect for human rights and democracy;
- To maintain an open and inclusive policy aimed at bridging cultures;
- To explore ideas of democratic citizenship.

The important feature that the Parliamentary Assembly looks for, is that all candidates for the Prize deliver a strong political message connected to respect for human rights and democracy and that selected candidates have the capacity to guide visitors towards new knowledge and a deeper understanding of contemporary societal issues and to interactively explore with them the ideas of democratic citizenship.

Before we speak about this year's winner and screen the video, I wish to say a few words about the work of art that is associated with our Prize. [The] Joan Miró statuette "La femme aux beaux seins" is a symbol of the

Council of Europe Museum Prize. For the anecdote, the first Prize had been awarded to [the] Joan Miró Foundation in Barcelona. We are very grateful to the Foundation for this kind gesture and congratulate them on their 50th anniversary this year.

The statuette has been circulating among the winning museums from 1977 until February 2022 when the war of aggression started in Ukraine. [The] Joan Miró statuette was at the time hosted by the Gulag History Museum in Moscow – winner of the 2021 Museum Prize. Following considerable difficulties to bring the statuette back to Strasbourg, the culture committee made a decision in April 2022 to keep the statuette on permanent display in the Palais de l'Europe, and we now have a very nice place for it outside this hemicycle.

I propose to screen now the video that presents the winner of the 2025 Council of Europe Museum Prize – The Euskararen Etxea (The House of Basque Language), Bilbao, Spain.

Let the video roll.

Dear colleagues,

The Euskararen Etxea (The House of Basque Language) in Bilbao, Spain – winner of the 2025 Council of Europe Museum Prize – is a grassroots initiative with intergenerational activities to promote the revival, transmission and use of the Basque language.

The House of the Basque Language is a small museum, located in a working-class neighbourhood outside the centre of Bilbao.

The museum showcases the challenge of preserving a language, as we have already seen in the video. While based on accurate and scientific information, the exhibition offers a bold, fun and imaginative way of storytelling. Visitors can listen, read and sing in the Basque language.

The exhibition is presented in four languages – Euskera, Spanish, English and French – which allows visitors to trace the similarities and mutual influences between these European languages.

Instead of objects, the museum focuses on the wealth of stories, emotions, resilience and resistance of the Basque language, people and culture.

The museum provides a collaborative working space for local associations and individuals to develop projects to promote the language and related activities. The educational programme and a “travelling museum” have been developed with the University of Bilbao.

According to the judges who visited this museum, the minority language is portrayed positively as a bridge between people and a tool for belonging and inclusion. The museum attracts many new citizens from Latin America and Africa, who are regular family visitors with children.

It is “a big-little museum”, with only three permanent staff members who manage many activities and a network of partners, including the University of Bilbao and many civil society associations and a local football club. The museum helps to create social ties and a stronger community both locally and abroad with diaspora communities.

The Assembly of the Council of Europe praises the democratic resilience and inclusiveness of this small museum, since the museum offers a powerful and unique perspective on Europe and European identity, seen through the lens of a minority language. The Euskararen Etxea carries a strong message of hope for the future.

We therefore congratulate Ms Iurdana ACASUSO, if I have said it correctly, the director of the museum and her team for their commitment, determination and creativity to revive the use of the Basque language through a wide range of activities that are designed to reach – in a very

dynamic way – a broad audience and bring different generations and different cultures closer together.

Let me also congratulate Ms Elixabete ETXANOBE, President of the Bizkaia Provincial Council and Ms Leixuri ARRIZABALAGA – and we think that Greek names are difficult – Deputy for Basque, Culture and Sports, who are both with us today and provide all the necessary support and funding for the museum and its activities.

Dear winners, like Joan MIRÓ once said, "I try to apply colours like words that shape a poem". You managed to prove that words, a language, shape a culture and a whole identity. So I want to thank you and to congratulate you once again.

Congratulations!