

# *Check against delivery - Seul le prononcé fait foi*

---

## **“CULTURE WITHOUT BORDERS: EUROPEAN CULTURAL ROUTES”: PRESENTATION OF THE CULTURAL ROUTES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE PROGRAMME**

**Speech of Mr Levan KHARATISHVILI, Vice Chair of the Governing Board,  
Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe (EPA)**

Wednesday, 30 October 2019 at 9 a.m. – Room 2, Palais de l'Europe

---

Dear Representatives of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is a great honour to **present the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe** to the Congress its delegations from the 47 member States, in my capacity as Vice-Chair of the Governing Board of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe.

- **Europe faces today unprecedented challenges:** in an age of globalisation, migration flows and climate change, our continent grapples with several issues that threaten the very notion of European identity and the future of European integration: nationalism, populism and xenophobia, violent extremism and deep-rooted social and economic inequalities and regional conflicts risk to jeopardize the future of the European project: a project built on common values, peaceful coexistence, social progress and intercultural dialogue.

- Discussions about culture and identity are today at the centre of the public debate, both within European Institutions and among our member States. In a particularly delicate moment of our history, **cultural heritage** is seen as one of the indispensable pillars for the **strengthening of our European identity** and our shared values, demonstrating the value of our cultural heritage in a complex geopolitical scenario.

- The richness of our cultural heritage is what makes us Europeans, it is what provides us a sense of belonging to a common European identity and a space of shared values championed by the **Council of Europe for over 70 years**: human rights, democracy, the rule of law and the protection and promotion of our cultural diversity. Since its beginnings, the Council of Europe has been aware of the **importance of cultural heritage** for achieving greater unity among Europeans. With its 70 years' experience, the Council of Europe has become the leader in the field of cultural heritage expertise, with numerous conventions adopted by its 47 member States, resolutions and recommendations from both its Committee of Ministers, Parliamentary Assembly and Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

- All the way back in 1954, the **European Cultural Convention** was adopted as a foundation for European co-operation to preserve culture and the "common cultural heritage of Europe" as an integral part of our European common heritage. The **Convention for the Protection of Architectural Heritage of Europe** and the **European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage** soon followed to underscore the Council of Europe's focus on integrated conservation and public involvement in the protection and management of cultural heritage. In 2000, the **European Landscape Convention** entered into force, focusing on the protection and promotion of our European landscape as central political concern: a landscape understood as the result of a cultural, social,

economic and historical process. **The Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society** was more recently adopted to promote dialogue, democratic debate and openness between cultures fostering mutual understanding and recognition between communities and individuals. The Faro Convention's emphasis on people and communities, cultural heritage and dialogue, sustainable development and socio-economic activity testimonies the Council of Europe's focus on "**Heritage for all**", reaffirmed in our recent "STRATEGY 21: European Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st Century", launched in 2017. This work demonstrates the importance that the Council of Europe has always placed on the **preservation of culture and heritage in a pan-European perspective**.

- Transcending the cultural and political barriers which marked Europe during and after the great conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the **Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe programme** built upon this legacy, expanding it across all Council of Europe member States and beyond since its establishment in **1987** with the **Santiago de Compostela Declaration**. 1<sup>st</sup> Cultural Route certified by the Council of Europe that year. A **Cultural Route is defined** by the Council of Europe as "*a co-operation network aiming at the development and promotion of an itinerary or a series of itineraries based on a historic route, a cultural concept, figure or phenomenon with a transnational importance and significance for the understanding and respect of common European values*".

- Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe **cover a wide range of different themes**, from art to architecture, to landscape to major figures of European history, art, music and literature. Each cultural route combines tangible and intangible heritage, illustrating and celebrating the exchanges, cultures and traditions that have shaped Europe over the millennia, thus helping us understand our present and approach our future with confidence. From the 1<sup>st</sup> route certified in 1987, **38 Cultural Routes** are today an integral part of the programme, having been certified by the Council of Europe over the years. These **linear, territorial or reticular** routes cross **more than 50 countries** in Europe and beyond. Each Cultural Route is a grass-roots network composed of different destinations, organised by a **legal association** federating members belonging to a **minimum of 3 European countries** linked by the same theme, whose members (representing over **2,000 cities, local authorities, regions, cultural institutions, and SMEs**) jointly implement activities along the route while mutually increasing their visibility among the general public. Cultural Routes are unique transnational cultural heritage networks carrying the label - the 'quality brand' - of the Council of Europe.

- The ambition of the Cultural Routes programme is **to go beyond a static appreciation of cultural heritage linked** to a single location promoted at national level by such programmes as the UNESCO World Heritage Sites and the

European Heritage Label initiative **to move towards a much more dynamic, ever-changing and bottom-up definition of cultural heritage.** European Cultural Routes merge our historical roots and the need for further European integration – an initiative to connect a diverse, at times fragmented continent creating concrete narratives and **transnational networks of shared cultural heritage.** Cultural Routes are not to be understood exclusively as physical pathways, but also as historic **journeys across space and time.** They act as channels of dialogue, underlining Europe’s common cultural identity among its people and regions, made of shared history, traditions and both tangible and intangible heritage. Cultural Routes **create bridges** across countries and between European travellers, local communities, and their inhabitants.

- Over time, **the idea of heritage and its cultural, social and economic role has changed considerably.** If heritage was seen initially as a sphere to be preserved and almost protected, it has now emerged as having a fundamental role in promoting active citizenship and participation at community level with an increasing role for creative industries and cultural tourism. Hence, Cultural Routes perform a very valuable function as they promote the values of the Council of Europe and provide meaning at European, national and grass-roots level:

- First, they **provide a cohesive narrative involving many of our member States, their communities and organisations** that otherwise may not have the

opportunity to work together. In the very act of developing a route, organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors, together with local communities, are brought together in common purpose. **Routes are important instruments for story-telling –involving many different voices.** The Routes bring together tourism agencies, heritage managers, the cultural and creative industries, small and medium sized enterprises and the hospitality sector in their creation, management and development. Theme-based trails or networks can physically or virtually link towns, attractions and sites of historic and cultural significance and take the visitor “off the beaten track”. It is evident that the regions integrating a Cultural Route are not equal. That is why participating on a cultural route can be relevant in order to create synergies between main regions and less developed areas through cooperative and shared strategies. By partnering in a Cultural Route, territories can optimise funds, boosting market knowledge and develop joint marketing initiatives concerning thematic grassroots cultural experiences.

- Second, **they provide a platform for cultural exchange and creative cultural expressions** and in doing so add to the artistic and cultural life of those along the Route and provide for new experiences for visitors. The stories that the routes tell provide inspiration for various artistic interventions, festivals and events. Partners across route networks can develop trans-national projects that lead to the further raising of the quality of the visitor experience and public understanding and appreciation of the Cultural Routes. Visitors can expect to discover not only

monuments, historical artefacts and archaeological sites, but also landscapes, local products, practices, traditions, beliefs and stories specific to each place. The itineraries thus open access to culture for all by means of sustainable tourism at the local level: it is an unequalled cultural offer for travellers, which makes them become **co-creators of their experience and temporary citizens** of the sites visited.

- Third, **the educational aspect of the Cultural Routes** is very important. By bringing attention to the common values shared across borders, irrespective of language or cultural differences, the cultural routes bring communities together. Their engagement with young people is important in keeping collective memories alive and encouraging the protection of the common cultural heritage well into the future.

- Lastly, a vital aspect of the Cultural Routes relates to **their capacity to develop sustainable cultural tourism**: forms of tourism built upon on the principles of sustainability, community involvement and the production of local goods and services.

Cultural heritage is one of the most important attractions of Europe as a touristic destination. Cultural Routes are new and successful cultural narratives useful to alleviate the touristic pressure on the most well-known heritage cities and sites – a response to the dangers of mass-tourism. Cultural tourism is an increasingly



**important driver for development in many regions of Europe and the routes provide a distinctive product that cuts across boundaries, enhancing less-known and often rural destinations.**

- A crucial aspect characterizing the Cultural Routes is their commitment to fostering cultural tourism as **engine of economic development**, especially for local SMEs.

In this context, one of the vital sectors for the promotion of our cultural sector is through the involvement of private business: cultural institutions, creative industries, but also the private sector active especially at local level catering to cultural tourists: hotel and accommodation industries, local arts and crafts businesses.

- It is in fact of paramount importance that cultural routes cross not only well-known tourism destinations, but also, many sites off-the-beaten track. Among the 31 Cultural Routes certified by the Council of Europe, **90% of them traverse rural areas**. Europe's future is to be found in the cultural and social fabric of our local communities, our cities, neighbourhood, our towns and villages. This recalls the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the promotion of tourism to foster cultural heritage as factor for sustainable development, as well as the **Resolution of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe** on the promotion of cultural tourism as a factor for development of the regions, which stresses the need to offer "tourists as

diversified touristic experiences as possible; (...) in addition to the more traditional sites, such as archaeological sites, churches, castles and museums, visits based on regional gastronomic traditions, regional rural or industrial produce". Indeed, The Congress of Local and Regional authorities has a fundamental role to play in promoting European cultural heritage and Cultural Routes at local level, promoting active participation of local communities, public institutions and civil society.

- If the **Congress has an important role to play to support such transnational networks at local level**, in order to provide political, strategic and financial support at national level, **the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe** established in 2011 the **"Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes" (or EPA)** with **14 founding member States**. Over the years, the EPA has grown steadily, counting today **33 member States** with the much welcomed accession of **Latvia** so far this year and the request for Observer status by **Albania, Ireland and Sweden** for the period of one year.

- **To obtain the certification** "Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe", new cultural route networks must commit to the Programme's mission and satisfy specific eligibility criteria. They are certified "Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe" by the EPA Governing Board in conformity with **Resolution of the Committee of Ministers** CM/Res(2013)67. According to the Resolution, they have to: 1. address a theme representative of European values and common to at least

three countries in Europe; 2. Be the subject of transnational, multidisciplinary scientific research; 3. Enhance European memory, history and heritage; 4. Support cultural and educational exchanges for young people; and 5. Develop innovative and exemplary projects in the field of cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development. Following their certification, Cultural Routes undergo a **rigorous 3-year regular evaluation**. This is essential to maintaining the **highest standards** and to ensure that the routes continue to develop and improve their activities. Since the establishment of the EPA, 18 new cultural routes have been certified of which 15 just in the last 5 years, indicating a clear upwards trend.

- **Member States have begun to notice the importance** of the programme and its political relevance. During their recent **Chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers**, Croatia, Finland and now France, have all included cultural routes events in their programmes. During the current **French presidency**, an exhibition on the Cultural Routes crossing France was organised in the hall of the Ministry of Culture in Paris, an initiative giving visibility to the programme to the general public and also sparking a lot of interest from other EPA member States such as **Greece, Georgia and Germany** who all expressed their wish to organise similar initiatives in the framework of their forthcoming Chairmanships.

- **2019 has been a very successful year** for the programme. Last April, the Governing Board of the EPA **awarded the certification** "Cultural Route of the

Council of Europe” to **five new European networks**: The European Route of Industrial Heritage, the Iron Curtain Trail, The Le Corbusier Destinations, Liberation Route Europe and the Routes of Reformation. In the framework of the regular 3-year evaluation cycle, **8 Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe** were recertified and **1 route is currently undergoing an exceptional evaluation** to ensure full compliance with the certification criteria. We have just launched the **2019-2020 certification cycle** with **3 new candidate routes** who applied for certification (“The European Route of Historic Gardens” being among them) and **8 regular evaluations**.

-2019 saw the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe programme receive the prestigious **CARLOS V European Award** during an official ceremony presided over by **His Majesty the King of Spain** who awarded the prize to former **Secretary General** Mr JAGLAND in Yuste (Spain) on Europe Day (9 May). The prize was awarded for the programme’s remarkable contribution to the general knowledge and promotion of Europe’s cultural and historical values relating to cultural diversity, respect of multiculturalism, intercultural dialogue, and transnational collaboration around cultural heritage and European history. Previous prize recipients include Simone Veil, Helmut Kohl, Mikhail Gorbachev and Jacques Delors to name only a few.

- Among its activities, the EPA organises annually an **Advisory Forum on Cultural Routes** hosted by one of the EPA member States. Past Forum editions were organised in Austria, Azerbaijan, France, Germany (in the city of Gorlitz last year), Italy, Lithuania, and Spain. The Advisory Forum enables member States representatives, international organisations, Cultural Routes operators, candidate networks, local and regional authorities, civil society organisations, and other heritage and tourism organisations to meet. The 9<sup>th</sup> Advisory was hosted by Romania just last week in the historic city of Sibiu, European Capital of Culture, and was devoted to the topic of "cultural tourism". My thanks go to the Romania authorities for the organisation of such an important event. **Greece and my country Georgia will host the 2020 and 2021 editions of the Advisory Forum.**

- A **Training Academy** for Cultural Routes is also organised every year with the support of the European Institute of Cultural Routes and in collaboration with one of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe. The Academy provides cultural route network operators with training on specific current issues in the field of cultural heritage management and tourism promotion. This year it took place in Visby, Sweden at the Invitation of **The Hansa** and focused on the topic of **funding for cultural routes**: a handbook on funding opportunities for cultural routes was published as a result of the meeting. Next year the Training Academy will be hosted by the **"Impressionisms Route"** near Fontainebleau, France.

My country, **GEORGIA**, has been extremely active promoting the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe. We have formed a special Cultural Routes Unit within the Ministry to effectively run the program; established an inter-agency steering committee, bringing together all national stakeholders with an ultimate objective to increase the level of cooperation and coordination on a national level. Georgia has already joined 4 certified cultural routes and is in the process of joining 3 routes. We have launched national certification process that largely contributes to exploring new cultural routes throughout the country and allocated funds to support enhancement and development of cultural routes. We have created a dedicated web platform and made available information on all routes, materials, instructions and guidelines. This year, we have launched special cultural routes free mobile app for Android users and next year it will be available for iOS users as well. With the help of this app one can easily plan and explore all routes both national and transnational that cross our country. We actively collaborate with local municipalities, organise trainings, information sessions and other capacity building activities to support further accession to all relevant certified routes and initiate new ones. Georgia is hosting two important events in 2020: 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly of European Rock Art Trails and 4<sup>th</sup> European Forum of Historic Gardens. We are now in the process of signing the MoU with Georgian National Tourism Administration and plan to sign the MoU with the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia that will further help expand the program and enhance our cooperation and synergies.

- At the request of its member States, the EPA commissions **Country Mapping expert reports** to provide an inventory of information on cultural routes at national level. The 2019 report was prepared for **Georgia**. This year **Turkey** requested a country mapping report to better assess the potential for cultural routes development in the country. The results will be presented to the annual EPA Governing Board meeting in April next year. **Brochures and visibility materials**, including an Annual Report, are published regularly on our website in many European languages.

Dear Congress Representatives,

- **Established in the 1980's** the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe programme provided a strong message for cultural-co-operation and deeper European integration. **In today's Europe**, the programme maintains all its relevance as a powerful tool for intercultural dialogue, for promoting a shared European identity while protecting cultural diversity -in line with the core values of the Council of Europe.

- The citizens of Europe are today more than ever called to reflect on their common values, in these times of questioning the very idea of Europe, threatened by a wave of extremisms and conflict. The cultural routes provide an answer and constitute a tool for raising awareness. They highlight the importance of similarities more than

their differences, through a process of open reinterpretation of the stories that have marked the continent's past, from ancient times to the present day, beyond stereotypes, geographical, political and cultural boundaries.

- At a time when our societies faces such new and profound challenges, culture and heritage must remain at the core of our policies and strategies. And for this purpose, **countries across Europe need to work together**. I am convinced that the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe Programme is playing its part in promoting sustainable initiatives to address these challenges: Fostering transnational projects in which a great number of local initiatives convey. Connecting community-based actions into bigger networks and promoting their visibility and access to visitors. And I am persuaded that moving in this direction will continue giving fruitful results for the sustainable development of rural areas and the enhancement of the well-being of local communities as well as for promoting intercultural dialogue among European.

- European Cultural Routes are the embodiment of a dynamic view of cultural heritage, a voluntarist conception of a heritage which is open to connecting, creating and innovating in a transnational perspective open to dialogue and to "the other". Building and expanding our Cultural Routes can provide us the opportunity to share our collective knowledge more effectively with the rest of Europe. **I invite you to join us and our Cultural Routes along this journey of discovery.** I



thus **strongly encourage local and regional authorities to join the networks composing our 38 Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe** and participate in the further development of this wonderful grass-roots initiative. We strongly believe that a culture that is not shared is doomed to disappear!

**Thank you very much for your attention.** I now look forward to your questions and remarks.