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### **The Council of Europe Core Values at the Heart of European Museums**

*“The award scheme of the Museum Prize has an important role in promoting the core values of the Council of Europe, the values that we cannot take for granted and that we need to keep defending continuously.”*

*Ms Vesna Marjanović, member of the Serbian Parliament and former Rapporteur for the Council of Europe Museum Prize*

The Council of Europe is the oldest European institution and is proud of being at the forefront of defending democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It was founded in 1949 in the aftermath of the Second World War to preserve peace in Europe through the respect of common fundamental values. The founding fathers of the organisation recognised indeed that legal and institutional safeguards of democracy and human rights cannot remain sound and solid unless they are embedded in culture as a basis for developing tolerance, freedom, equality and respect for human dignity.

Consequently, the Council of Europe has launched cultural cooperation among its member countries based on the European Cultural Convention (1954), gathering more than 60 long years of experience in policy guidance related to culture and heritage. Four specific conventions were developed dealing with architectural heritage (Granada, 1985), archaeological heritage (Valetta, 1992), landscape (Florence, 2000) and more recently with the value of cultural heritage for society (Faro, 2005). It is also of interest to mention the two conventions for the protection of the audiovisual heritage (2001) and on cinematographic co-production (revised, 2017).

Today given the new political and societal challenges brought by the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Council of Europe action in the field of culture and heritage focuses on promoting **diversity and dialogue** to cultivate a sense of **identity, collective memory** and **mutual understanding** within and between numerous communities in Europe. Through its Pan-European membership of 47 member States, the Council of Europe connects citizens from Reykjavik to Vladivostok with a common cultural bond.

In this wider context, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) recognised early the important role of museums acting as a resource for human development and citizen engagement. In the recommendation adopted on 18 March 1977, the Parliamentary Assembly had set out a basis for the present scheme of European museum awards comprising the European Museum of the Year Award (EMYA) and the Council of Europe Museum Prize run by an independent committee and aiming at new small or medium-sized museums. The geographical area for the scheme was from the outset that of the European Cultural Convention.

On 14 February 1978, the First European Museum of the Year Award ceremony was hosted by the Mayor of Strasbourg, Pierre Pflimlin, in the Palais Rohan. Kenneth Hudson, John Letts of National Heritage,

Richard Hoggart (former Assistant Director General of UNESCO), Lluís Monreal (Secretary General of ICOM) and other members of the judging committee participated in the event. The award was presented to the Ironbridge Gorge Museum in the United Kingdom and a Special Prize was given to the Barcelona Miro Foundation in Spain; this has become the first of the museums listed for the Council of Europe Museum Prize.

As an anecdote, the gift of the Joan Miró statuette "*La femme aux beaux seins*" by the Spanish Government for the Council of Europe Museum Prize was negotiated by Lluís Monreal and selected by Andrew Faulds, British actor and politician, who initiated the scheme within the PACE Culture Committee.

Together with the European Museum Forum (EMF) the Parliamentary Assembly has established a long and resourceful partnership, observing developments over the years in European museums, seeking out examples of best practice, stimulating innovation and investigating the ways in which museums can best serve their communities and wider European society. Today, on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the joint award scheme, we pay tribute to this successful partnership, which is strongly carried by the succeeding EMF Presidents and highly competent, committed and enthusiastic judges.

Forty years have indeed borne witness to some 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. From the outset, the Parliamentary Assembly and the European Museum Forum (EMF) firmly believed that museums have to be "visitor-orientated", putting the public increasingly at center stage. This has triggered many other important changes for museums from museums' collecting policies, interpretation strategies and educational programmes, to museum architecture, governance structures and funding.

The 1990's were crucial in bringing new opportunities for closer cooperation and more regular exchange between museums in Western and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the gap may still exist in what can be achieved in museum practice across different parts of Europe, depending in particular on available funding and on overall state policies and incentives. Several PACE rapporteurs have underlined that it would be important to reward not only first class museums working under very favourable conditions but also exceptional achievements under less favourable conditions, as a way to stimulate innovation and creativity across all parts of Europe, and particularly today in the context of economic crisis and increasing cuts in public funding in many countries.

In her recent parliamentary report on "[The libraries and museums of Europe in times of change](#)", Lady Diana Eccles has put emphasis on the cultural, social and economic importance of smaller and medium-size museums in Europe which play a crucial role in their local community and are under pressure to reduce their public service or even to close. The report looked at new and expanding roles for museums at the start of 21<sup>st</sup> century, considering economic pressures and challenges for the sector, and brought forward ideas and examples of how to make museums resilient and sustainable. As a result, the PACE [Resolution 2100](#) from March 2016 called on governments to increase cross-government recognition and support for museums and to ensure that public service provided by smaller institutions is maintained as part of the wider cultural and heritage infrastructure.

Over the years, the Parliamentary Assembly and its Culture Committee have particularly promoted cultural rights as an integral part of human rights. Culture represents a fundamental base on which to build a stable, peaceful and prosperous society, where every individual can grow, be respected and valued.

In this respect, the Council of Europe Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society ([Faro Convention](#)) represents a key political instrument as it introduces a much wider understanding of heritage, which is considered not only as an asset of the past but more importantly as a resource for human development, for the enhancement of cultural diversity and for the promotion of intercultural dialogue.

These concepts are particularly important to apply in the context of reconciliation in post-conflict situations where cultural heritage as a symbol of cultural identity may have been a target for destruction. Examples

exist in the countries of former Yugoslavia, in the Caucasus and in Cyprus, but also in other parts of Europe where political, cultural, ethnic or religious divisions and intolerance are rapidly gaining ground. People's fears and lack of confidence correlate with the erosion of civic bonds and the wearing away of established values.

In her report on "[Culture and democracy](#)", Ms Vesna Marjanović therefore argued for a much stronger recognition of the role that culture can play in upholding democratic principles and values, and building inclusive societies. Culture and the arts can, for example, open up the "protected" public sphere in order to tackle conflicts in society. Museums and other cultural institutions exercise the faculty of memory by dealing with complexities of the past in order to innovate for the future. They can offer meeting places and safe spaces for dialogue, communication and personal development. Artistic freedom can make possible the expression of conflictual positions which might otherwise be politically difficult or unacceptable. This can prove more productive than silencing such political positions.

In its [Resolution 2123](#) from June 2016, the Parliamentary Assembly therefore called on European Institutions to assert new political priorities and give a tangible follow-up to the political declarations made by the Ministers of Culture of the European Union in Riga and the Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe in Brussels concerning the promotion of citizenship and the common values of freedom and non-discrimination through culture and education. The Assembly insisted that sustained investment in cultural activity and education must be given equal priority with investment in the economy, infrastructure, security and all other areas seen as crucial to Europe's global economic competitiveness and stability.

The Assembly also recommended that governments: support the right of everyone to participate in cultural life as a core human right, seeking to offset barriers which hamper the access to culture of women, youth, minorities, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable groups; promote the diversity of cultural expressions and cultural pluralism as positive factors for innovation and development; secure sustainable funding for cultural policies and develop strategic thinking at inter-ministerial level to mainstream culture in other policy areas; encourage partnerships between the cultural sectors and the education system to promote the understanding of freedom of expression; increase public participation in the definition of cultural policies and involve interested citizens and non-governmental organisations in the management of cultural institutions; measure cultural vitality and evaluate its impact on the democratisation of society.

As a result of such political orientations, **specific criteria** were developed for the Council of Europe Museum Prize, reflecting over the years the priorities and aims of the organisation. They are to be considered in addition to the criteria which are based on professional excellence sought for the European Museum of the Year Award (EMYA) and associated awards. These specific criteria could be visually described as three main "pillars" supporting a "platform". The first pillar represents the museum's ability to highlight the value of culture and heritage and help people to understand them. The second pillar is about the museum's ability to promote human rights and democracy, and sharing our common values. The third pillar refers to the museum's ability to question individual and collective identity, enhance the understanding and appreciation of multiple cultural affiliations (complex identities) and promote bridging between cultures. These three interconnected pillars support a fourth encompassing key idea, which is to promote "cultural democracy". Or in other words to seek the specific role of museums in offering opportunities to very diverse audiences to gain a better understanding of what each of us is as an individual and what we are as a community, as a society and as humankind.