

Goodwill Message¹

Dear Participants from all over Europe,

First, I would like to thank you very much for inviting me to today's conference on *Post-War Heritage in Central and Eastern Europe*.

I am very happy to comply with this, and I am extremely pleased that you have managed to organise this event despite the difficult current circumstances of the pandemic.

With your event today, you are addressing a topic that is very important to us in Germany and to which we have devoted ourselves over the past two and a half years: **Dissonant Heritage as a central focus in our work in the Urban Agenda for the EU.**

As part of the Urban Agenda for the EU, we are engaged in an intensive European dialogue on our cultural heritage.

We have jointly discussed highly relevant questions, among them: What is particularly important for our cultural heritage, what are the particular needs? What does it take to strengthen, protect and further develop Europe's heritage?

Our ministry, together with our Italian colleagues, is leading this three-year European process. In the end, we expect to have answers to these questions and to make recommendations – for municipalities and regions, for member states and for the EU – how to deal with cultural heritage in a more advanced and cautious way.

One so-called Action is dedicated to the “controversial”, “difficult”, “uncomfortable”, “dissonant” or even “dark” cultural heritage in Europe and explores integrated approaches for dealing with it.

One of the starting points dealing with this topic was the extraordinary Buzludzha monument in your city of Kazan-lak, which is also member of our working group in the Urban Agenda.

Thanks to the commitment of numerous actors, among them the Getty Foundation, safety work has been carried out on the monument, and perspectives for future-oriented uses have been developed.

Since our initial conversations, one of the most important questions was: How can Buzludzha, a place of historical importance for many Bulgarians, be made accessible to the public? And how can it be meaningfully linked with the other cultural treasures of your region – including the UNESCO World Heritage site of the Thracian Tombs and your unique rose tradition? We consider these “integrated approaches”, this connection to urban and regional development and tourism, to be very important.

Out of this initialising project in Bulgaria a remarkable European action has grown. With a group of European experts, including ICOMOS, the European Investment Bank

Institute, the Dutch Federation of Cultural Heritage Cities, the European Observatory on Memories at the University of Barcelona, and numerous others, we have developed a so-called Action and have looked at roughly 50 other “dissonant heritage sites” all over Europe now.

We are particularly pleased that we have also succeeded in setting up our own research project. Already now, while we are still in the middle of the process, the project has already made valuable European connections, for example to the Council of Europe's cultural routes programme.

Our aim is to find out how to deal with dissonant heritage in different parts of Europe – how it is managed, what political and financial support it receives (or lacks), how the local population can be reached, which cooperation exists or should be established.

We are particularly interested in the dissonant heritage of the 20th century, which so significantly shapes our Europe of the 21st century, and in the smaller cities and peripheral regions that so far have often been overlooked.

We are currently conducting surveys at the 50 sites already mentioned, ten case studies and ten expert interviews and will reflect on our findings at an expert workshop in Barcelona in October.

We would like to use this valuable knowledge to develop a toolbox with principles and recommendations for all those who deal with their dissonant heritage: for instance, in the areas of urban development, monument protection, creative industries, marketing and tourism.

I am convinced that we are working on a very timely and relevant topic that has a lot of potential and whose protection and further development are very important:

1. Important because of its potential for cultural education and for the communication of history:

Our debate helps us to deal with and understand the identities of Europe and the different time layers that shape our cities. With our open debate, we face Europe's responsibility in terms of history and memory for an urban policy in the service of cultural diversity, tolerance and democracy building. In the current discussion on “Black Lives Matter” and the consequent reinterpretation of colonial history and its monuments, the discussion about “uncomfortable” or “controversial” heritage is particularly timely and opens up very relevant reflections about the heritage related to our future.

2. Important because of its potential for cultural tourism:

Dissonant heritage can release valuable economic potentials for urban society at large, thus enabling communities to care for their heritage, and can raise awareness for unusual monuments and sites as they become alternative destinations and foster innovative forms of cultural tourism.

Strategies for successfully dealing with dissonant heritage can only be developed in an open and public dialogue that is rooted in the local context.

By enabling dialogue like today's conference, we can ensure the direct involvement of citizens and citizens' initiatives.

Thank you very much for your attention!

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¹ Text of the opening video message to the conference.