

## Statement on Cooperation with NGOs and the wider Civil Society

In recent years the importance of NGOs and the wider civil society, including private owners and other stakeholders, that are active in the field of heritage, has been more widely acknowledged.

The Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for the Society "*recognise(s) the role of voluntary organisations both as partners in activities and as constructive critics of cultural heritage policies*" [Faro Convention, article 12c]

We now need to foster a more balanced dialogue between stakeholders at all levels; European, national, regional and local. There is much to learn from each other as we share the same fundamental goal and ambition, to protect and preserve our heritage for all. Open dialogue and good cooperation between the public authorities and NGOs, both at the national and European level, is crucial for the continued care of our cultural heritage.

National or umbrella heritage NGOs, as well as their European networks, can be powerful partners in policy making and raising awareness.

Across Europe the NGO sector is very varied. In some countries NGOs have been recognised as partners at the national level for many years, but in other countries NGOs remain organised at the very local, even site level.

It is our role as the state authorities to help strengthen civil society at all levels, encourage capacity building activities and assist in providing a suitable platform to allow these important voices to be heard.

In turn, it is the role of civil society to "*establish their credibility through their achievements, standards and ability to take responsibility*" as stated in the Portorož Declaration on the role of voluntary organisations in the field of cultural heritage adopted in 2001. [Portorož Declaration, article 15]

State bodies and NGOs play different but complementary roles in the protection of our cultural heritage. Recognising this and building on respective roles and strengths is the best way to develop a fruitful cooperation.