

**Florence 18 May, EUROMEETING**

**Penelope Denu,  
Executive Secretary, Council of Europe Enlarged Partial Agreement on  
Cultural Routes  
Director, European Institute of Cultural Routes**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Minister,

Vice-President,

Thanks to the Tuscany Region for the invitation

Thanks to the NECTouR network that the region chairs

I am very happy to be here today and to see such dynamic action in favour of cultural routes. It is an honour to be taking part in cooperation with the European Commission, and today is a very positive demonstration of the commitment of our two organizations to promoting cultural tourism in Europe's regions. A commitment which will be renewed and amplified in the Commission's "Crossroads for Europe" event in Pavia in three weeks' time.

**"The World is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page."**

The Council of Europe believes that reading only a page of the World's book is not enough to ensure personal and collective fulfillment and lead a full and satisfying existence.

We are convinced that European citizens can only adhere to the values we uphold, only learn to live together in true democracies where the human rights of all are respected, by achieving greater knowledge and understanding of each other's cultures, histories and identities.

And what better way to get to know our neighbours than to visit them or to be visited by them? To know enough about our own stories to be able to tell them to other and listen to their own? And on the way, to travel with our eyes and ears open along well-worn or lesser-trodden paths, making more new acquaintances as we go.

Nowadays of course, the word "journey" has many meanings. It can be physical, but thanks to new technologies travelling can also be virtual, making every destination more accessible to people in Europe and beyond.

The Council of Europe's cultural routes programme promotes the sharing of European culture and heritage, and helps to guarantee the fundamental right of access to culture for everyone.

Today, cultural tourism is becoming more and more popular, a fantastic response to the growing curiosity and thirst for knowledge engendered by our "information society". At a time when the economic climate is at best uncertain and at worst a trial to be endured, interest in culture can represent a return to lasting values, an escape from harsh day-to-day life and an outlet for imagination and creativity.

This interest in cultural tourism is a real opportunity for our countries, regions and local communities. Investment in the preservation and accessibility of tangible and intangible cultural heritage is returned many times, and all decision makers must be made aware of its potential for

sustainable economic development. Regions like yours are models of this development, and as such have a responsibility to share experiences and good practices with those regions which are just beginning to engage in this development.

The European Commission is doing much to help with this development by devoting substantial funds to cross-border tourism projects, and the Council of Europe is contributing with its expertise and conventional *acquis*. We will continue to work in close cooperation in the future.

I would like to give you a short overview of the latest developments concerning the Council of Europe's Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes and on the action of the European Institute on Cultural Routes to carry out the programme.

In November last year I was appointed executive secretary to the enlarged partial agreement which was adopted for a trial period of three years in December 2010. The decision was taken that the person nominated would also direct the Institute in Luxembourg, thus joining responsibility for EPA and the EICR and channeling energies, resources and initiatives and ensuring the closest possible cooperation between the EICR and the CoE.

The first year of functioning of the EPA has been very positive, with a committed Governing Board and Bureau led by Mrs Elke Atzler of Austria. 14 member states have signed the agreement, and many countries have expressed interest in joining. Germany participated as an observer at the April meeting of the Governing Board and will join in 2013. However, slow progress with membership, therefore a real need for all stakeholders to communicate the value of the programme and for coordination between specialized ministries which are all enthusiastic

about the programme, and the foreign ministries which are often more difficult to convince.

Since last autumn, much of the time of the secretariat and Bureau was devoted to the evaluation of 21 of the 29 existing routes and 4 new proposals. The decisions on certification were finalized in Strasbourg two days ago at the meeting of the new intergovernmental steering committee on culture, heritage and landscape.

The long discussions in the Governing Board on some cases were not necessarily linked to the evaluation itself – usually, it was quite clear whether or not the route was complying with the criteria – the difficulty was rather to establish the principles on which decisions were taken. It was decided unanimously to apply an objective, impartial judgment to routes.

Decisions were taken on withdrawal of the certification of 7 of the 29 certified routes. It was difficult to part with such interesting, meaningful themes even on a temporary basis, as the Board has insisted that the Institute assist the routes to ensure compliance and re-apply in three years' time. But the credibility and quality of the whole programme were at stake.

In a sector where cultural routes are numerous, the Council of Europe's programme must be unique and a mark of excellence, and therefore all the criteria must be fulfilled.

Two new routes were accepted to the programme during the meeting, the route of Casa dei sites and the Route of Industrial Ceramic Heritage.

Also:

- visits to routes, especially for annual General meetings of networks, to ensure these are functioning according to Resolution CM/Res(2010)52,
- meetings at the Institute for new projects to assist them in preparing for certification
- work on a more systematic, communicative relationship with routes, revision of the questionnaire to be filled in by applicants and a breakdown of the questionnaire into chapters, which may be the subject of expertise provided by the Institute or by independent experts on our database of experts, and subject to a fee.
- the Governing Board has asked the Bureau to continue working on a communication strategy, and to work on future priorities for the selection of new cultural routes.

*What the EPA changes:*

- present routes were certified before the Partial Agreement so no differentiation between countries, now developing routes in signatory states will be a priority
- funding is a direct consequence of membership of the EPA, so the programme is not dependent on the Ordinary Budget but on new members
- non-member states and the European Commission could accede, the EU is working on its overall approach to membership of our partial agreements

## *EU cooperation*

- Last year, a first joint programme produced a study on the impact of cultural routes on SMEs
- Since last autumn, a second joint programme, developing capacity building to optimize the potential of routes for local development. Chapters on management, network governance, branding marketing and visibility. Outcomes will be rolled out over the next year at the following events:
  - the Commission's new concept of Cultural Routes Crossroads, this year held in Pavia and focusing on routes with religious heritage. We'll showcase 6 routes and participate in a conference, where among other presentations we'll talk about the first action in the framework of the new joint programme.
  - a week-long summer school at the Strasbourg Youth Centre in the first week in September, using the draft version of a vade mecum we will then publish at the end of the year. We would like to make this training an annual feature, with the help and collaboration of the European Commission.
  - the annual Advisory Forum will take place in November in Colmar, bringing together routes, academics, professionals in cultural tourism and other stakeholders to exchanges information, experiences and new developments. This forum will be a very special one, as we will associate member states more closely, in particular for an exhibition and reception in Strasbourg to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the programme, hopefully also to mark the accession of several new members of the partial agreement.