

**CULTURAL ROUTES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
30TH ANNIVERSARY (1987-2017) – 7TH ADVISORY FORUM**

**OPENING STATEMENT**

Ms Deputy Secretary General,  
Mr President of the Province,  
Mr Mayor,  
Ms Prefect,  
Mr President of the EPA,  
Mr Director,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am truly delighted to be among you today at the 7th Advisory Forum of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, representing the European Institute of Cultural Routes. And therefore let me start, first of all, by thanking the Italian authorities, Mrs. Gabriella Battaini Dragoni, and the President of the Enlarged Partial Agreement for inviting me.

Every year, the Annual Advisory Forum is a key event in the agenda of the Cultural Routes. This year the relevance is even more outstanding, given that we are celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Cultural Routes. On a personal note: the fact that I have the honour to speak at the Forum the year of this anniversary really is quite special for me. Not only because I have been working with the Institute for a number of years; but also because I associate with walking on the very first Culture route of the Council of Europe, which started it all in 1987, one of the most marking, positive and enriching experiences I've made so far.

The Cultural routes programme has grown in size and importance over 30 years, with 31 certified Cultural Routes today, crossing more than 50 countries in Europe. This continuous development of the programme obviously confirms its success and, if I may say so, the quasi flagship status it reached lately. In a larger context, it also underlines the enormous benefit it represents for the individual, as well as for societies as a whole, by opening up Europe's cultural richness and by raising their awareness to the primacy of spiritual and cultural values over utilitarian and materialistic expectancies. Be it a thousand years ago or today: cultural routes allow to overcome borders of all sorts, to discover cultures in their differences and similarities, to meet and to give a better understanding of peoples. Moreover, whereas a thousand years ago, the old routes were often dangerous, fearsome and miserable, today they translate into freedom, encounters, contemplation and pleasure in the beautiful. From that point of view, the cultural routes have an effective impact dimension on the individual and societies that has no equal.

That's also why I am very happy today to represent the European Institute of Cultural Routes that will celebrate its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year. As you know, the Institute is the *cheville ouvrière*, the kingpin of the programme, providing advice and assistance to routes networks; carrying out regular evaluations of the compliance of Cultural Routes with the criteria of the statutory Resolution; giving advice to new applicants for certification; hosting visits by project managers, researchers and students; compiling and housing the extensive information and documentary resources of the programme; coordinating a university network; and, last but not least, implementing European projects promoting greater awareness of the existing links between cultural heritage, tourism, regional development and the environment.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the directors, past and present, as well as the staff of the Institute for their dedication and commitment. Likewise, the survival and remarkable development of the Institute would not have been possible without the decisive and firm engagement, since 1998, of the successive presidents of the board of the Institute. The road of the routes hasn't always been easy, at times it even resembled a bit a *traversée du desert*, but the commitment and belief of all those people in the programme and what it stands for were and are truly crucial.

The ministry of Culture of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg has supported the programme since 1997/1998 when it decided to host the European Institute of Cultural Routes in Luxembourg-City and to offer the programme a home, thus supporting the oldest pan-European International Organisation and its founding values: human rights, democracy and rule of law. The establishment of the Enlarged Partial Agreement further strengthened the Cultural Routes programme of the Council of Europe, confirming Luxembourg's commitment to this long-standing partnership. We are proud that both the EICR as well as the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes have their seat in Luxembourg.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the end of the day, we can all be proud and happy about the achievements and success of the programme – it all wouldn't happen without the routes and all those who carry them forward. To let them take the stage, I will stop here, expressing my sincere thanks to all those involved in the organisation of this great event, and wishing all participants a fruitful Forum.

Thank you for your attention.