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Minister Owen Bonnici: “Culture is essential to our Union”

The knowledge of and appreciation for culture are essential for a better society in order for us to be better persons

European conference titled ‘Cultural Diplomacy: Fostering International Cultural Dialogue, Diversity and Sustainability’ was held in Malta as part of its Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers.

The conference, opened officially by Minister for Justice, Culture and Local Government Owen Bonnici, aimed at strengthening the relationship between countries in the areas of culture and heritage. The conference also addressed various culture-related topics high on the Maltese Presidency agenda, such as issues of cultural diplomacy and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Minister Bonnici stated that today’s world is facing new challenges such as fake news, radicalisation, illegal migration and cyber threats, which are abusing of cultural diversity by creating divisions among peoples.

Minister Bonnici highlighted Malta’s belief that our different cultures are fundamental bridges that can bring us together in new ways by strengthening our relationships through understanding. “Culture and cultural activity are essential to our union,” Minister Bonnici, highlighted that assuming the role of an honest broker between EU members, the Maltese Presidency has chosen culture as a central theme of its agenda.

The European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport Tibor Navracsics held that he would like to see culture at the heart of the EU since culture enables us to understand each other irrespective of our differences and hoped to see countries working together towards the same goals.

Indeed, the role of culture in the consolidation of the union has also been recognised at an EU level, with the coming year having also been designated as the European Year for Culture—the same year when Valletta will be holding the title of European Capital Culture.

Minister Bonnici also remarked that culture and cultural cooperation can be considered in isolation from all other activities of our societies, because they are intrinsically intertwined. Cultural Cooperation should be treated in a holistic manner and should be based on three main points: as a tool for diplomacy, as a means of sustainability of social



09.03.2017

and economic development and cooperation on cultural heritage.

The Minister emphasised that the unity in cultural diversity paves the way for peaceful intercommunity relations and participation in this sector should be highly encouraged especially in youths, who are considered to be our future leaders.

He continued that culture should be seen as an element which intertwines with other sectors such as tourism, education, research, creative industries and new technology, adding that through culture we strive to leave a lasting legacy for our future generations. This belief is fundamental to the work we have done and are doing in Malta, even as we work towards Valletta 2018 through capital investments and infrastructural projects such as the new Museum of Fine Arts MUŻA, the MICAS project a space for contemporary arts, the Valletta Design Cluster, the digitisation of historic archives like the notarial archives and contemporary archives such as the public broadcasting archives regeneration and restoration projects, as well as the creation and investment in festivals, educational programmes in the arts and broadening of cultural knowledge at all levels of our society. The knowledge of and appreciation for culture are essential for a better society in order for us to be better persons, the Minister said.

Moreover, while the cultural sphere creates jobs in its own right, the rehabilitation and the promotion of cultural heritage attract tourists, thus boosting the economy and create employment. Minister Bonnici said that Malta worked on various projects whereby it kept the character of historic towns whilst urbanising such area.

The Minister also urged the audience to engage in a debate on the strategic approach to international cultural relations, in order to help creative industries to continue expanding, thus creating growth and jobs.



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