



draft

Aalst Declaration: Fostering and Promoting the Cultural and Linguistic Heritage of Europe
Aalst
15 June 2015

The European Alliance (EA) group at the Committee of the Regions, at its extraordinary meeting in Aalst (Flanders), held on 15 June 2015, confirmed its commitment to actively contribute to the Fostering and Promoting the Cultural and Linguistic Heritage of Europe, and agreed on the following declaration.

The European Alliance group:

1. believes the EU with its 28 Member States spans an enormous length and breadth of physical geography, linguistic and cultural diversity. The EA Group believes that Europe's strength lies in its diverse cultural and linguistic heritage;
2. considers language, culture and cultural heritage as a human value, supporting national, regional and local identity, protecting cultural and linguistic diversity, with due respect for lesser used and regional languages; promoting culture and cultural heritage is essential in order to strengthen identity and democratic values in Europe and to contribute to social and economic cohesion;
3. believes that cultural heritage is a very broad concept which does not only include tangible artefacts but also a wide range of shared values, lifestyles and practices which strongly influence our perceptions and our daily lives;
4. feels that the role of cultural and linguistic heritage is not given the recognition it deserves, believes the European Union needs to ensure that the fostering and promotion of Cultural and Linguistic Heritage of Europe is core to its policies and programmes;
5. acknowledges that the celebration and commemoration of cultural and linguistic heritage unites in diversity EU citizens, helps build understanding, inspires identity and creativity, ignites the concept of active citizenship;

6. will continue to work to support national and regional identities assuring that the respect and acceptance of cultural and linguistic heritage is one of the basic principles underlying the process of European integration which is not about levelling out differences or creating uniform identities but fostering greater cooperation and understanding among the peoples of Europe;
7. stresses that it is of paramount importance to preserve and promote the different regional and local identities which make the European cultural heritage unique, such as language and traditions which are endangered by demographic changes and economic globalisation; at the same time acknowledges the huge socio-economic benefits that our cultural heritage brings through activities such as arts, tourism, food specialities, and enjoyment of the historic environment;
8. stresses that it is fundamental that young people acknowledge, understand and appreciate their heritage and feel it as part of their identity. They are the future guardians of it. In this regard calls for a more proactive approach to promoting European cultural heritage and its diversity among young people and children;
9. underlines that fostering national and regional cultures and languages is a decisive factor for successful integration and participation in the policy making (political life) of citizens and immigrants in particular;
10. urges national and regional authorities to maintain the primacy of their own language(s) when providing education at all levels in order to preserve the diversity and richness of European languages;
11. emphasises the need to place adequate attention to the preservation of cultural, linguistic and historical heritage, despite the budgetary cuts;
12. wishes to see more proactive EU media, audio-visual and IT policy which seeks to promote the cultural and linguistic heritage of Europe;
13. notes the important role of libraries, museums, theatres and art galleries to maintain cultural heritage;
14. supports the further promotion of excellent initiatives such as European Capital of Culture, European Heritage days and Creative Europe Initiatives; That such initiatives form part of the foundations of understanding of urban and regional diversity in the EU.
15. believes that the Capitals of Culture programme has given cities the time to think about the role of culture in smaller European cities. They are able to consider the potential of shared ideas through collaboration and co-operation in the EU.

16. contends that European Heritage Days have allowed citizens to become informed of the heritage work of the EU and to see and debate the extent of work being pursued across the EU to unlock regions where the promotion of heritage in all its forms adds positively to diverse ways of life.

17. supports the aims of the Creative Europe project, which continues to place a focus on the cultural and creative sectors and express Europe's immensely rich and diverse cultural heritage, and contributes to the development of our societies. Creative Europe is designed to protect and promote cultural and linguistic diversity in the EU, strengthen the competitiveness of these sectors, and open up new markets, opportunities and audiences for those involved.

18. instructs its president to forward the declaration to the CoR President, European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council.
