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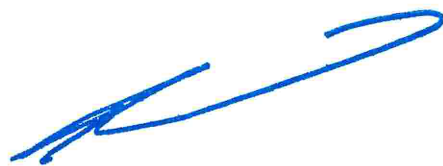
Your conference: "Heritage interpretation for the Future of Europe", provides me with a timely opportunity to say a few words on the importance of cultural heritage.

As you might know, we are going to propose to celebrate in 2018 the European Year of Cultural Heritage. This would be a wonderful opportunity to promote European excellence in the field of cultural heritage and raise awareness of what the EU is doing to support it. It would also be further proof that Europe and its institutions consider cultural heritage to be a vital sector in today's world.

Of course, we cannot restore heritage sites with the sole objective of their preservation. They must have a role in conveying our history and our values to this and future generations. Heritage sites remind us that today's society is the result of centuries of political, artistic, scientific and intellectual development. Through interpretation, I believe heritage can contribute to the building of communities, not just at local level, but also on national and European levels. Bringing citizens closer to their heritage is about bringing them closer to each other, and this is an important step towards a more inclusive society. Through our European Heritage Label initiative, we contribute to shaping a European narrative, bridging the past and the future.

Interpretation of heritage sites needs our backing and I am very happy that the European Commission provides financial support to your project which seeks to help professionals enhance their skills in this area, not just through your international conference but also through the other initiatives you are working on, such as the mapping report and your dissemination activities.

I congratulate you on all your activities in the field of heritage and I look forward to continuing our work with you in the future, in particular on the occasion of the possible European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018.



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