

Foreword

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In 2011 the International Cultural Centre, an institution born out of the European and global breakthrough that was the fall of the iron curtain, celebrated 20 years of its work. It was no accident that the ICC was the product of cooperation between the Tadeusz Mazowiecki government and the new local authorities of the city of Krakow, elected in the spring of 1990. This is why even today the Centre's projects and actions may be perceived not only as an attempt to draw the new Poland into international cultural dialogue, but also as a quest for a place for Krakow on the new map of Europe, a place that will be appropriate to its potential and ambitions.

Krakow has become our observatory of the world. From our seat on Krakow's Main Square we can see the mountains and the border with Slovakia. Civilisation arrived here from the south, via the Moravian Gate. It is for this reason that Krakow is a better vantage point than Warsaw not only for Prague, Bratislava, Budapest, Vienna, Zagreb and Trieste, but also for Silesia, Moravia, Spiš, Styria and Transylvania. The Polish presence in the heart of Europe is thus the responsibility of Krakow.

Here at the ICC it has been our aim since our foundation to offer a multi-dimensional reading of the past in interaction with our neighbours. These two decades of shared reflection on our common history have reinforced our belief that effective protection of our cultural heritage is only possible if we accept its diversity.

Central Europe is a question of our world view, but also of the community of experiences that encompasses us ourselves and our neighbours. This is a unique part of the Old Continent, where political borders have always changed more rapidly than cultural ones. Central Europe is our destiny, not a territory with strictly defined borders. The identity of Central Europe is based on contradictions that have often generated creative

tension. The tangible and intangible fruit of that tension today is our common heritage, the product of centuries of accumulated, intermingled cultures, ideas and values. And this heritage consists not only of material assets of our culture, but also of our memory and our identity.

Memory and identity have been major issues in Central Europe since the fall of communism, and the Visegrad Group countries should be seen as an especially important laboratory of the new thinking on cultural heritage at the threshold of the new millennium. After 1989 the cult of the past and the piety surrounding monuments that are characteristic of these nations suddenly came up against tumultuous and all-encompassing change. Globalisation, integration, and above all the processes of transformation not known in the west of Europe have all had a significant impact on the way we relate to our cultural heritage. The modernising pressure which is not sparing the cultural landscape of the countries undergoing this transformation process is forcing them to revise their heritage protection systems.

The Heritage Forum of Central Europe is a new initiative of the International Cultural Centre, called into being not only to enrich our dialogue with our neighbours on our shared heritage, but above all to serve as an important voice from Central Europe in the global debate on protection of our cultural patrimony in conditions of turbulent change.

Have we come far enough to understand this change? For it is not only the change precipitated by the peaceful revolution at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, but also that of the past 20 years of transition from a world of borders to a world of horizons. In a sense, the historic dimension of the year 1989 blurs the legibility of the change we have been experiencing over the last two decades of transformation, European integration, and globalisation. The Forum is an attempt to address the fascinating nature of the change that has characterised so many levels of life over these past 20 years – change which is at least in part the product of changing borders and expansion of space for dialogue.

The first Heritage Forum of Central Europe took place in the context of the series of meetings of experts during Poland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union. This project, although organised by the ICC, would not have been possible without the cooperation of our long-term partners the Department of Monument Protection at the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic (Odbor památkové péče Ministerstvo kultury České republiky), the Monument Protection Council in the Republic of Slovakia (Pamiatkový úrad Slovenskej republiky) and the State Cultural Heritage Office in Budapest (Kulturális Örökségvédelmi Hivatal).