

Remarks given on behalf of Werner Wnendt, Senior Deputy HR at a Donors meeting organized by the Commission for National Monuments Preservation and Norwegian Embassy

Honorable Ministers, Excellencies,

Honorable Chairperson and Members of the Commission to
Preserve National Monuments, Ladies and Gentleman,

We have gathered here today to see presentations of different strategies for the preservation and protection of the national and cultural heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina . I am sure that many people will ask: Why give priority to monuments, when there are so many other issues that seem to be calling for immediate attention? There are still so many people in this country who cannot go back to their homes, since they have no possibility of getting a job there. Their children cannot get the education they wish for. Families remain torn apart, so why should we care about monuments?

The answer is simple. One of our priorities is to enable return, to create preconditions for sustainable return, to help returnees rebuild their shattered lives. We should never forget that cultural and national heritage reflects identity. Therefore, its preservation and protection helps to rebuild broken communities, and bridge their past with their future.

More than 50 years ago the International Community recognized the need and the importance of the preservation and protection of national and cultural heritage. In May 1954 The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict was adopted as the first international agreement strictly focusing on the protection of cultural heritage. Soon it became clear that not only in time of hostilities, but also in time of peace, the protection of national and cultural heritage is of major importance.

Today more than 100 states which are Parties to The Hague Convention are obliged not only to lessen the consequences of armed conflict for national and cultural heritage, but also to take preventive measures for its protection. This is exactly why, among many integral elements of the Dayton Peace Agreement, including economic, social and cultural revival, Annex 8 has a prominent place. It carries the agreement of the former warring sides to preserve national monuments throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina . It has also given a foundation for establishing a special commission with authority to designate property of special cultural, historic, religious or ethnic importance as national Monuments: the Commission to Preserve National Monuments.

Annex 8 is of a major political and symbolic significance. Its relevance to the rule of law and the protection of human rights and the rights of minorities is very obvious. Full implementation of Annex 8 and related legislation, therefore, remains a priority task in the day-to-day business of restoring and reforming Bosnia and Herzegovina .

It is the duty of the International Community as a whole, but more so of the authorities in this country, to protect the integrity of cultural heritage sites from destruction and deterioration. The biggest burden of this now rests with the Commission to Preserve National Monuments, but a huge drawback lies in the fact that the Commission has no instruments to implement its decisions. Therefore it is of crucial importance

to strengthen the function of the state for the protection of national and cultural heritage.

In spite of all efforts, losses due to natural and man-made disasters will continue to increase, and more and more cultural heritage sites will be adversely affected in the future. However, this does not have to be so. Vulnerable and endangered cultural and national heritage sites can be and must be protected. We have to remember that they carry the direct reflection of people's identity, and what could be more important for the integrity of any people?

The Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina together with International Community has the moral responsibility to raise the consciousness of the local levels of authorities as well as of all people about the importance of the protection of national and cultural heritage.

Let me remind you that the process of implementation of Annex 8 has been strongly reinforced by the High Representative's Decisions regarding the relevant Entity legislation in order to harmonize rules and regulations regarding construction permits, time limits and legal recourses. But there is still a long way to go. Many sites of national and cultural heritage in this country are inadequately protected and this certainly deserves the immediate attention of all of us.

Safeguarding of these sites is extremely important since they represent irreplaceable and unique properties of great value to the heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina , and furthermore to the heritage of the whole of Europe .