

Portugal, extraordinary historic houses in peril

The Portuguese built patrimony is an exceptional part of the European cultural heritage as our architecture displays the intimate vision of life that is unique to our people. This is evident through the harmonic proportions and the human scale of Portuguese houses, the serene beauty of our gardens and the symbolism of our monumental architecture.

Unfortunately, the general condition of the Portuguese patrimony is deplorable. Up till now, there has been a bias against the listing of houses to ensure their protection. Our association identified 2600 classifiable houses in derelict condition, and estimates that the full inventory of such houses would amount to more than 15 000, most of them in need of urgent repair. This happens essentially for 3 main reasons:

- As a rule, historical houses belong to too many owners, who lack the interest, the resources and the know-how to turn them

into self-sustaining assets;

- The general public is not really interested or even aware of the cultural value of this patrimony;
- The government and the European stakeholders have not yet recognized the importance that the recovery of historical houses may have, once opened to the public, for the development of our country's economy namely by enabling the promotion of widespread cultural tourism.

The Associação Portuguesa das Casas Antigas will host this year the General Assembly of the European Historical Houses Association from the 3rd to the 5th of October 2014 and will try to take advantage of this opportunity to make the public and the authorities aware of the problem and of its plausible solutions.



Don Hugo O'Neill
President of the Associação Portuguesa das Casas Antigas



Conference on movable objects

On March 19th 2014, the European Historic Houses Association held a conference in collaboration with Dorotheum on the theme “Between family heritage and universal remnant of the past: the management of movable heritage nowadays”. Participants filled the conference hall in the prestigious Cercle de Lorraine, in Brussels, to hear of the diverse aspects involved in the management of movable heritage, stemming from the perspectives of a private owner and art expert, a legal adviser and a specialist on illicit trafficking of cultural objects. It offered participants a holistic and pragmatic approach involved in possessing and transmitting movable heritage. It also reminded the audience of the undisputable emotional link between owners and these objects, as they bring both joy and pride, but also challenges when it comes to theft, insurances and succession. For more information, a report will soon be made available on our website.



The 2014 European elections

The European elections of May 2014 will be a major event this year and will determine the next 5 years for the European Union. Through the direct universal suffrage, citizens of all 28 Member States will be invited to vote for their representatives on the week of the 22th of May. A new legislature presents an undeniable opportunity to increase the interest on cultural heritage, including the defense of historic houses as we may raise the awareness of the newly elected Members of the European Parliament on these subjects. We stand ready to fight the good cause and to remind the leading figures that historic houses and cultural heritage matters. Indeed, so many statistics corroborate the fact that they play a key role in Europe's economy and society. The European Historic Houses has created, for the first time, a Manifesto presenting our Association and its priorities for the new legislature with straight-to-the point facts and information. You may find it on our website at www.europeanhistorichouses.eu.

We have to remember the lessons from the past, tackle the concerns of the present and maintain hope and ambition for the future.

The European Historic Houses Association's Initiatives

Now that 2014 is well on its way, it is imperative to present a few of our Association's priorities for the coming months. We have taken big steps in trying to involve the young generation of successors into our Association, as we believe they can bring fresh ideas and a new dynamism, as well as needing support and knowledge in order to tackle the challenges involved in managing a historic house. Under the umbrella of the European Historic Houses, this group, in the process of being set up, would present a new lobbying opportunity, as today's politics are interested in the youth's voice. This action is also very positive when thinking about the future of the Association. A second initiative for 2014 is the launch of national studies that would gradually analyse the state of historic houses in every member countries. It would give us, our members and the politics a holistic, comprehensive overview of the situation across Europe, on all major aspects involved in their maintenance, protection and success in legislation. This knowledge will help the Association tackle the specific issues of every country but also to identify the common ones. Finally, the European Historic Houses Association, in collaboration with Le Marche Segrete, is now in the early stages of elaborating a EU Project on the enhancement of minor, decentralized historic houses and their surroundings in order to obtain EU financing. Indeed, as the 2014-2020 programs are being presented, it is an undeniable opportunity, but also a challenge, for the Association and its members.



Upcoming events

- 1 April 2014 - Forum for the Future of Agriculture (FFA, Brussels)
- 2 April 2014 – "What future for Europe's religious heritage?" (Brussels)
- 2-6 May 2014 – Europa Nostra Congress (Vienna, Austria)
- 13 May 2014 – ADSI General Assembly (Roma, Italy)
- 5-8 June 2014 – Friends of the Countryside General Assembly (Italy)
- 3-5 October 2014 – European Historic Houses' General Assembly (Lisbon, Portugal)

The European Historic Houses is a European association, based in Brussels, acting as the voice of private historic houses in Europe and defending the interests of their owners. Its work is aimed towards major issues linked to cultural heritage such as environmental issues (PPP Directive), fiscal issues (reduced VAT on restoration and maintenance work to historic monuments), the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) and security issues (theft, keeping and illicit trafficking of cultural goods). The Association brings together 19 national associations from 16 European countries, and 3 observer country, and represents more than 50,000 historic houses in Europe.

European Historic Houses Association

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