



ICOM-Europe, In der Halde 1, 14195 Berlin, Germany

Chairman

**To the
Chairpersons
of the National Committees
of ICOM in Europe
and
of the Regional Committees**

Berlin, 10th of September 2005

Dear colleagues,

after the summer holidays have ended for most of us, I would like to address a few words to you as the new chairman of ICOM-Europe. First of all I wish to thank the members of the board for their confidence and express my gratitude to Dr. Hans-Martin Hinz for the work he has done as former chairman. It is remarkable to experience how many doors he has already opened – a good basis to go on from. I am sure that Hans-Martin will continue to support the activities of ICOM-Europe in his new position as member of the Executive Council.

As you probably all know ICOM-Germany plays a special role – not only financially – in supporting our activities. I very much appreciate, that Dr. York Langenstein, president of ICOM-Germany, and the two Executive Secretaries Katja Roßocha and Johanna Westphal have offered to continue their valuable help with a strong commitment to our agenda. Thank you very much for that.

Is there a unique European way to do museum work? This is a difficult question, I know, but I want to try to answer it in order to open a debate, because I think we need to know why we are working for museums in Europe. We need to know how our daily effort is linked to the big questions of European identity and its development. And we need to know, what challenges lie ahead.

I have the vision of a new Europe, that I imagine like a gate. This gate is being supported by two pillars, that reflect basic elements of the European heritage. The first pillar has its fundament in the tradition of Socrates' philosophy according to which we are not born free, but only reach freedom through dialogue and engagement. This incorporates the principle of mutuality as the basis on which identities are formed. Only through the other, in debate and quarrel, we will know who we are. And it means, that we should thrive to approach each other as equal. I believe culture serves as the best field for this, because economic, political or social equality is much more difficult to achieve. Only in culture and the arts we have the chance to approach each other on even grounds.

The second pillar has its fundament in the Greek word *ethos*, defined as the habit of regular stay or shelter. It means to emphasize the principle of hospitality towards the stranger. We may think of the way European cities in the Middle Ages gave shelter for refugees and those in need of sanctuary. This hospitality can only be offered for a limited amount of time as Kant pointed out. And it should be a basic effort of every stranger to learn and adapt to his new surroundings. The basis for understanding is to approach one another with empathy and respect. It requires to listen to each other very carefully.

The third element of the gate, its connecting roof or top, should be dedicated to the individuality of each human being. It means to respect the differences in habit, gender, longings and behavior of each individual and certainly to foster his infinite potential for creativity. To allow difference is a cultural good, that has to be fought for. None of this comes by itself. Respect for the individual is something we still have to learn more about, because the dark shadows of the European 20th century, that has so much oppressed individuality, are still very long.

These three elements compose what I call "The Gate of Europe" and create the entrance to what being European should be about. All these ideas are closely related to the agenda of ICOM-Europe for the next years and I would appreciate, if we would start a discussion about these points. Please don't hesitate to write me your comments.

Just two weeks ago I had the pleasure of opening the "Baltic Museology School" in Bernati, Latvia, and to meet our board-member Agrita Ozola and the new president of ICOM-Latvia Ginta Gerharde-Upeniece. On its invitation card you could see a wonderful arrangement of rocks from the Baltic Sea. Each rock reflects an individual story, each rock is special, different from the next. To me it symbolized the importance of individuality, showing us, that we should care for every single object, not classify it as one of a kind, but to see and record its specific features, as well as its meaning for the person we received it from. ICOM-Europe will continue to be patron of the "Baltic Museology School", because I believe, that its high standard contributes excellently to the European landscape of museums. The lecturers this year were the Swiss museologist Dr. Martin Schaerer, Vice-President of ICOM, and Dr. Merethe Froyland, a Norwegian geologist with significant knowledge in museum education. (http://www.bms.edu.lv/bms_eng/)

Forthcoming is the conference "Shifting Borders – Changing Identities" (17.9. –24.9.2005), that also stands under the patronage of ICOM-Europe and has jointly been organized by ICOM-Lithuania, ICOM-Belarus and ICOM-Ukraine with the support of ICOM-Germany. I am sure, that the outstanding engagement of Alexander Kolbasko and all the other colleagues will contribute to an interesting encounter on cultural grounds. I am very much looking forward to visit the "rolling conference" at its venue in Lviv, Ukraine. (<http://www.icom-europe.org/activities.htm>)

The joint conference of ICOM-United Kingdom and ICOM-Germany from the 27th to the 29th of October 2005 in London will be an important event to underline the internationally oriented activities of both national committees and I would like to recommend more joint ventures of this kind in the future. I am very grateful, that Prof. Jack Lohmann, president of ICOM-United Kingdom, has supported this venture intensively. (<http://www.mda.org.uk/icom-uk/>)

From January 9th to the 14th 2006 I will represent ICOM-Europe in Vietnam at a conference , that is dealing with tourism and sustainable heritage. This topic is in many ways valuable for museums in Europe, because tourists are a key group of our visitors. In Vietnam I hope to be able to have a meeting with the chairpersons of the other regional ICOM organizations. (www.sustainabilityconference.com)

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Building bridges from the past to the present through exhibitions will be the main aspect of the conference organized by ICOM-Europe and ICOM-Arab in Berlin and Oldenburg that will presumably take place towards the end of March 2006. In Berlin the new permanent exhibition of the German Historical Museum will be part of the program as well as a visit to the Museum of Islam Art. The exhibition "Saladin and the Crusaders", that tours also Mannheim and Halle, will be visited and discussed in Oldenburg. (http://www.archlsa.de/saladin/en_einleitung.html). I would very much appreciate, if all members of the ICOM-Europe board would participate in this conference and would like to welcome you at my museum in Berlin-Neukölln. In case of urgent help to finance your trip, we are able to give some financial support. Please let us know.

Although many other activities will take place until then, I would already like to focus on May 2007, where I am planning to organize a conference in Andalucia, Spain. The main topic in the year of the 50th anniversary of the treaty of Rome, I believe, should be the future of museums in Europe, concerning cultural diversity, migration and the development of the Mediterranean area. The period of the "first enlightenment in Europe", so called by the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, during the time of the califate (from the 8th to the 14th century) could be an excellent setting to foster the Euro-Arabian dialogue, regarding Muslim, Christian and Jewish traditions. As soon as I have response from the key partners I would like you all to contribute with ideas for the topics, that we should focus on at this conference.

ICOM-Europe will develop only if its members participate in its activities. There is still a lot to do, especially to strengthen its general acceptance within ICOM and eventually its financial structure. The task force, that was implemented by the Executive Council and is being chaired by Gary Edson and Hans-Martin Hinz, are working on a paper, that intends to specify the role of all regional organizations within ICOM.

I am very much looking forward to hear from you and to receive your comments.

Sincerely yours,



Udo Gößwald

P.S: In another attachment you will find a short portrait of myself and my work.