

SPEECH BY SPYROS MERCOURIS
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In 1983, the then Greek Minister of Culture, Melina Mercouri, proposed to the European Community to designate each year a European city as a Cultural Capital of Europe.

Melina wanted to give a cultural dimension to the community.

The proposal was unanimously accepted and the institution of European Cultural Capital was created, with Athens being chosen as the first Cultural Capital of Europe for the year 1985.

The concept of the event of Cultural Capitals of Europe should show the character of each city which is nominated, with its history, tradition and contemporary creativity.

Athens wanted the event of Cultural Capitals of Europe to be NOT a festival but a meeting place for discussion, communication, and exchange of ideas, where artists, intellectuals and scientists would bring their work and efforts together towards the promotion of European thought.

Also the Cultural Capitals to be an event, in which the citizens of Europe could be more than mere spectators by allowing them to participate, define and shape new ideas and relationships in the process for a politically unified Europe.

As a result, in Madrid in 1992, a Network of Cultural Capitals of Europe was formed, and a big step taken towards a more concrete, practical and close collaboration between all Cultural Capitals. A vacuum had been filled and a link with the cities had been established.

When Patras was Cultural Capital of Europe for the year 2007, the Network of Cultural Capitals of Europe presented an exhibition with the title *"A Journey Throughout the World - 20 Years Of Cultural Capitals"* which showed the activities of more than 25 Cultural Capitals of Europe.

Rodolfo Maslias, ex General Secretary of the Network of Cultural Capitals of Europe, suggested in 2007, to the present Mayor of Athens, Nikitas Kaklamanis, the establishing in Athens of a Documentation Centre which would include all the programs and activities of all the Cultural Capitals of Europe. This has now been achieved.

The Documentation Centre is a panorama of cultural activities of all the Cultural Capitals of Europe up to now. It shows the huge amount of cultural events, infrastructures, editions, experience, know-how etc. that has been produced during the past 25 years. A unique Cultural Reference Centre.

From what has been said up to now, it is clear that the event of Cultural Capitals of Europe is not only what a cultural city offers and does on its own, but the contribution of all the Cultural Capitals together as a whole. Sadly, our times are dominated by the pursuit of money and by cynicism, mistrust, insecurity, and fear.

We all know that when the growth in material goods is not balanced by a parallel development of ideas and values, then the way of life produced is condemned to wither and degenerate.

I strongly feel that the Documentation Centre illuminates the way of coming Cultural Capitals of Europe and shows the strength and productivity of culture. We must believe in culture, our time needs culture as never before.