

PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release

Bright Future for the Religious Heritage of Europe

FRH Torch starts its journey to revive European religious heritage

On Monday 8th January 2018 in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, as part of the celebrations of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, [Future for Religious Heritage](#) (FRH) officially launched the [Torch of Heritage and Culture](#) – an initiative in conjunction with the EYCH Pillar for Sustainability, which highlights two initiatives: *Heritage in transition* and *Tourism and heritage*, aimed at promoting tourism and improving sustainability around cultural and religious heritage.

Inspired by the Olympic Flame in Athens, the Torch Initiative will raise awareness about the importance of Europe's rich culture and religious heritage, bringing together diverse community groups with different cultures, traditions and languages in a unified and coordinated action to foster unity while celebrating Europe's diversity.

Following the launch ceremony on Monday, the FRH Torch will now travel through Europe in the form of a treasure box to collect stories and messages from European citizens, prominent artists, musicians and politicians.

During the launch event, FRH's Council Secretary Lilian Grootswagers shared the [official video](#) of the Torch Initiative and lit the treasure box with some of the first stories to revive the legacy of our European heritage.

Amongst the first contributors to add their inspirational stories in Leeuwarden were the Deputy Minister of Culture of the Province of Friesland Johannes Kramer, the scientist, Todd Weir, University of Groningen, the Reverend Edna Zwerver, and the Syrian refugee Anas Hannoun.

In his personal reflection on the importance of Europe's religious heritage Mr Kramer said:



“Religious heritage is the place where community and religion intersect, where time meets place and where individual persons come into contact with a higher power.

“Every generation creates its own stories as well as its own monuments. To retain and preserve the wealth of all these stories, is a task for us all.”

On behalf of [Under de Toer project](#), the chair of the church of Huizum, Peter de Haan, shared a letter highlighting examples of reused religious heritage in Friesland that has attracted the interest of many visitors from all over Europe and the world.

Mr Haan said: “We live with stories and enjoy telling them to each other. Stories originate when people get together and pass them on. Years ago, people from Friesland got together on the mounds. Fleeing the water but also to collect fresh water from the community well. That is why many churches are built on a mound. Some are still in service as a House of God but some also serve as galleries, theatres, shops, houses or are simply empty. They will however always be buildings full of stories. Religious stories, part of religious heritage, but also stories about big or small happenings in the community that are told again and again.”

Mr Haan added: “The initiators of Under the Toer believe that these different stories told about churches will lead to interesting projects.

“We are proud that FRH choose Leeuwarden, the European Capital of Culture in 2018, and our church as a starting point of the Torch Initiative which we are sure will be a great success story of Europe’s religious heritage.”

Leeuwarden was only the starting point of the FTH Torch. During the next months, the initiative will continue its journey throughout Europe to collect individual stories from national ministers of culture, scientists, artists, refugees/immigrants and civilians.

The [next stop](#) of the Torch will be in Aschaffenburg, Germany, for the 10th anniversary of the European organisation Civilspace, on 23-26 February 2018. Then, The Torch will travel across Europe, and will be traced on a LIVE interactive map all the way to the FRH Paris Conference on 11 October, during which European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Tibor Navracsics, will be presented with the “treasures” of the box.

Mr Navracscics will also be one of the first people to submit a favourite story, memory or experience in the context of cultural heritage which has influenced him during his career or personal life. FRH deems that articulating the value of our heritage will give more strength to recognise the wider significance of Europe.

The treasure box will help rediscover the value of our shared heritage as a symbol of unity on which basis Europe was built. The extraordinary power of our heritage will help shape the future of Europe, unite citizens and improve the quality of their lives.

Join us in the revival of our shared heritage and become part of building a bright future for Europe. Cultural heritage is not only a legacy from the past but also a resource for the future.

ENDS:

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Notes to editors:

You can access the [official video](#) and the [launch ceremony](#) of the Torch Initiative from FRH's [YouTube Channel](#).

Also, watch FRH's Council Secretary Lilian Grootswagers giving a [pre-launch interview](#) to the regional news station of Friesland

The launch ceremony was shared on social media using the hashtags: **#FRHTorch** and **#EuropeForCulture**

More details about the Torch Initiative

Corresponding with the motto of the European Union - "United in diversity", the Torch will highlight the key role of our heritage through the centuries as a key aspect of European values. The initiative will bring together diverse community groups with different cultures, traditions and languages in a unified and coordinated action to foster unity while celebrating Europe's diversity. The Torch will offer visibility and carry the messages of famous artists, musicians, politicians and European citizens who will help rediscover the value of our shared heritage as a symbol of unity on which basis Europe was built.

A recent EU-wide survey showed that 4 out of 5 Europeans regard religious heritage buildings essential for community life, and want to promote them to a secular audience. 79% of Europeans believe that they have a crucial part to play in the survival of their communities in the future.

Masterpieces from Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Johann Sebastian Bach signify that religious heritage has always been close to European identity. Art and culture travel beyond time. The people of Europe have generated a culture, a set of ideas and ways of life, practices, and artefacts that have been handed down from generation to generation. Our heritage is a living tradition of Europe and we need your contribution to help raise awareness about the rich legacy which faith and culture left behind.

Ministers of Culture from each EU member state will be invited to take part in the initiative, along the countries' scientists, artists, refugees and civilians. The movement of the Torch across Europe will be traced on a LIVE interactive map that will provide a record of all countries and cities through which it has travelled. The initiative will kick off in Leeuwarden and end at FRH's Conference in Paris in October 2018 where it will be handed to the European Commissioner of Culture.

ABOUT FRH

Future for Religious Heritage (FRH) brings together those who work to protect religious heritage across Europe. FRH is a non-profit, non-religious organisation founded in 2008 and based in Brussels. As the only European Network for Historic Places of Worship, FRH is a leading voice for the active and engaged cultural life of all Europeans. FRH has 154 members in 38 countries, including NGOs, charities, government, religious and university departments. Since 2017 FRH is one of the 28 European networks supported through the Creative Europe Networks programme.

