Ladies and gentlemen,

I feel honoured and privileged to be here with you today and I wish to thank Ms Ifigeneia Kanara for suggesting me as a guest speaker.

Harvard University is a universally known beacon of knowledge and excellence. It is also one of the schools that can truly claim to be shaping the future while preparing the leaders of tomorrow.

It is therefore with humility that I approach my topic today: the place of cultural diversity in today's global politics, and the role of Europe in promoting and safeguarding such diversity.
I intend to focus on culture and intercultural dialogue in the process of European integration as well as in the European Union's external relations. And I will argue that culture, as a vector for statements of identity and difference, and for the transmission of values and symbols, holds a prominent, if sometimes hidden place, in the European project.

In fact, cultural diversity is at the core of the European project. Unity in diversity is the motto of our Union. Our eurocoins show on one side an image of Europe, but the design on the other side is left for each country to decide, and in many cases it shows a prominent symbol of national cultural heritage.

This diverse but interlinked heritage is among our greatest assets. As the European Commissioner for culture, my first concern is to protect the unique patchwork of national, regional and local cultures inside the European Union as indeed is provided by the EU Treaty.
Language serves as a useful measure of our diversity. Today, the European Union functions with 24 official languages, more than 60 regional and minority languages and more than 120 migrant languages. Since I am also the Commissioner responsible for multilingualism, allow me to say, with some pride, that the Tower of Babel still stands tall in 2014.

But of course all of this presents a challenge, and it lies in striking the right balance between the respect for cultural diversity and the construction of a shared European identity – an identity that does not replace the sense of national belonging, but adds a new layer to the multiple identities of our citizens. The search for this balance is part of what we call intercultural dialogue. It is an integral part of the European project, and it has been so right from the start.
Step by step, the European founding fathers – yes, we have borrowed the phrase from the United States – worked to build a community of people, and not only of states or administrations, in order to make peace an irreversible feature of Europe.

The Schuman Declaration in 1950 described this goal in precise words. Pooling the production of coal and steel was seen as “the leaven from which may grow a wider and deeper community”... the first concrete foundation of a European federation indispensable to the preservation of peace.”

Jean Monnet said it very clearly: we are not federating states, we are uniting people.
In 1992 the European Union's Maastricht Treaty introduced specific provisions on education and culture which have since become fields for EU action. The Treaty made clear that the EU should support cooperation among Member States but by no means replace national 'competences' or powers.

In the case of culture, the Treaty says that "the Union shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore".

Considering how far education and culture shape and define national identities, this was a radical step, and one which still occasionally causes surprise.
In education, such a breakthrough was in large measure due to the success of the Erasmus student exchange programme in promoting contacts between our people. By allowing students to get to know each other and develop cross-border relations and friendships, Erasmus greatly helped the creation of a European identity.

At the same time, by allowing universities to compare their operations, Erasmus has also shaped the thinking that led to the Bologna process – initially an intergovernmental initiative, even though the Commission eventually played a substantial role in it. The Bologna process in turn paved the way to much stronger cooperation in other education fields, from vocational training with the Copenhagen Process and to school education.

Today, education is firmly anchored at the core of policy coordination at the European level. This policy coordination is 'soft' in nature – the Union cannot dictate national policy – but that does not mean that it is not substantial and real.
Member States have agreed on common targets for education systems as part of the EU2020 strategy for growth and jobs, namely, reducing the rates of early school leaving and increasing the share of the population holding a college degree.

And progress towards the targets is closely monitored by the European Commission, which issues specific policy recommendations each year to all of our Member States. This level of policy coordination would have been unimaginable back in 1992.

In the field of culture, for several years European action was focused on supporting exchanges among cultural operators through funding programmes; and on flagship initiatives such as the European Capitals of Culture, the brain-child of Greek and French Ministers of Culture in 1985, Melina Mercouri and Jack Lang.
The purpose of the European Capitals of Culture was, and still is today, to bring Europeans closer together by highlighting the richness and diversity of European cultures, while raising awareness of their common history and values.

One of my priorities as a Commissioner for culture has been to renegotiate the legal basis for the Capitals of Culture, ensuring more rigorous selection criteria; a focus on long term culture-led development strategies; and a stronger European dimension.

Developing a common framework for cultural policy took longer than for education. In 2007, the adoption of a European Agenda for Culture marked the beginning of a new era of cooperation on cultural policy in the EU.
The Agenda set a framework for real cooperation across Member States, at ministerial level, by identifying topics of common interest such as promoting cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; unlocking the potential of culture for creativity and innovation; and making full use of culture in the development of our relations with partners around the world.

As Commissioner, I am interested less in the promotion of one specific culture or collection of cultures than in the progress of a certain idea of what culture means. We are convinced that culture is a powerful asset. Beyond its intrinsic value as a fundamental part of life, culture contributes to social cohesion, economic growth, job creation, innovation and competitiveness.
In the European Union, the cultural and creative sectors account for millions of jobs and up to 4.5% of our gross domestic product. The rich diversity of cultures and the wealth of creativity in Europe have the potential, if we can extend the reach of cultural operators beyond their national and linguistic confines, to contribute to Europe's recovery.

Looking back at the past seven years, the Agenda for Culture has largely been a success. Member States find that mutual learning and cooperation at EU level provide an important added value to their policy work.

We have made a strong case for the contribution of the cultural and creative industries to the European economy, and raised awareness of what needs to be done to unlock their full potential. In other words, we have created a useful set of arguments for any culture minister that has to fight for funds in the national budget.
Before the end of my mandate, I intend to issue a policy document highlighting the importance of a more strategic vision of cultural heritage, as an asset for economic development, social inclusion and a platform for intercultural dialogue.

And what is true for our internal policies also applies to the European Union's external relations. Here, our overarching policy is to promote cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; to unlock the potential of culture for creativity and innovation; and to make full use of culture in the development of our relations with partners around the world.

And since Europeans have built the European Union by acting within legal frameworks, a central element in all this is the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.
A Convention, to which, for the first time in the history of UNESCO conventions, the European Union, and not simply its individual Member States, was a signing party.

The UNESCO Convention entered into force in 2007. It is a unique development in international relations and, so far, more than 133 States have ratified it.

Cultural diversity is a common good that has to be protected from a sustainable development perspective, and this is why we actively promote the ratification and implementation of the Convention.

Developing a new and more active role for Europe in international relations, and a bigger place for culture in them, has been one of my key priorities as Commissioner, and is part of my legacy to my successor.

The reasons for focusing on culture within our external relations are manifold. Let me elaborate for a few minutes on this.
A British diplomat who later became an EU civil servant, Robert Cooper, once said that states have three instruments of influence: words, money and force. Of the three, words – that is to say, persuasion – would seem the weakest.

And yet, neither money nor military force will guarantee the desired policy outcome. We see few examples of complex problems being solved by pumping money into them, or by targeting bombs at them, for that matter. In the end, said Robert Cooper, people must want change, and must have a vision of what that change should be. They must be persuaded. They must be moved by words.

I don't think he was being naïve in saying this.

Let me remind you that I come from a still-divided country that has had its share of conflict and tragedy. I have seen with my own eyes that real, enduring peace
cannot be bought or fought into existence. Peace demands persuasion.

This notion is the essence of soft power, and culture is an important “soft power” asset for the EU and its Member States. Cultural ties facilitate people-to-people contacts and policies. These interactions favour the circulation and exchange of ideas and values and promote mutual understanding, just as the Erasmus programme has done.

All this, in turn, has positive effects on the development of political and economic relations with partner countries. And it is very important that, as Joseph Nye, another luminary from Harvard University has said, soft power does not need to be a zero-sum game.
If two countries manage to become more attractive in each other's eyes, then the prospects of damaging conflicts will be reduced.

Again, I do not believe that Europe's 'soft power' in the 21st century should be about projecting a cultural vision of what Europe represents; an attempt to create a unique EU geopolitical brand. Nor should it be reduced to a question of helping its artists and promoters to find new audiences.

Rather, I believe it should be about taking Europe's major historic challenge – how we manage our diversity – to the global stage, and engaging our partners in the debate.
Cultural diplomacy is a real opportunity to show the richness and diversity of EU cultures to other regions of the world. But it is also a way of sharing European values, such as freedom of expression, free and equal access to information, the independence of cultural life and expression and an inclusive society. It can create the necessary conditions for the development of grassroots initiatives and a stronger civil society.

The European Union can genuinely add value here. Of course, bilateral cultural relations between individual Member States and partner countries will remain important. But Member States acting alone cannot achieve the same results. Because what the EU can propose – and can illustrate better than the member states acting on their own – is precisely a successful model of inter-cultural dialogue on a large scale and over a long period of time.
Once again, the objective here is not so much the promotion of a collection of cultures as the progress of a certain idea of what culture means. And there is more to it than what has been called the "shining city on the hill" effect, although we have seen that this phrase has developed in its meaning over the time since 1630 when it was first used and then in 1961 by John Fitzgerald Kennedy and in 1989 by Ronald Reagan.

Because rather than attempting to project a set of diverse European cultural images onto the world stage, we try instead to bring the various cultural actors together so that they can exchange between themselves. We are exporting a method as well as showcasing a rich tradition and a wealth of cultural expressions.

We are doing it with our neighbours to the East and South, as well as with strategic partners like China, India and Brazil and with developing countries.
An essential tool is our funding programmes, in particular in what we call our neighbourhood to the East and South. These programmes are designed to help the cultural and creative industries to adapt to the challenges of globalisation, exploit the opportunities of digitisation, experiment with new business models, and develop the new skills that will allow them to build wider audiences.

And our flagship Creative Europe programme is open to the full participation of the countries from the EU's southern and eastern neighbourhood. We want to reinforce our cultural cooperation with these nations, by extending to them the same approach in support of the cultural and creative sectors that we are adopting within the EU. We are helping them to develop their economies, build up their civil societies, and integrate with the rest of the EU, at the same time as they are learning how to better define themselves through their culture and their artists.
Ladies and gentlemen,

The European project is built on the ambition to create unity and common purpose, in full respect of the diversity of the cultures and identities that compose it.

This is the image that the EU aims to project also on the global scene. The image of a union of diverse countries and people who believe in the power of living and working together in the name of the values that they share and uphold: human dignity, social inclusion, solidarity, tolerance, freedom of expression, respect for human rights and diversity, and dialogue among cultures.

Let me take inspiration from the words of a great American president, a native Bostonian and an alumnus of this great university.
Addressing the American University in 1963 in a landmark speech where he made proposals to loosen the grip of the cold war, John Fitzgerald Kennedy said:

"Let us not be blind to our differences – but let us also direct attention to our common interests and the means by which those differences can be resolved. And if we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity".

It is with this extraordinary statement that I would like to conclude our talk today. Helping to make the world safe for diversity is exactly what we are trying to do by giving culture a more prominent place in the external relations of the European Union.

This is why I am deeply committed to this effort, and I am so grateful for the opportunity that you have given me today.

Thank you.