

Madam Mayor, Mr. President, Ministers, my esteemed central bank colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

For me it is a privilege and an honour to inaugurate this event, together with Lord Mayor Petra Roth and President Jean-Claude Trichet, in the magnificent setting of the *Alte Oper*, which traditionally hosts the culmination of the European Central Bank's Cultural Days.

The Cultural Days, dedicated this year to Italy, are opening just days before the end of my term as Governor of the Bank of Italy and the beginning of my new position at the head of the ECB. This means that I will have the pleasure of being here in Frankfurt more often.

This year's edition of the Cultural Days is also distinguished by the fact that it coincides with the 150th anniversary of Italian national unity. At home, countless initiatives have retraced and commemorated the events that marked our history as a nation. Exalting Italy's social and cultural roots is essential, because a country ignorant of its past is a country without a future. I am thoroughly convinced that our common European identity must be founded first of all upon common knowledge of the history and the

traditions of the countries that make up the Union. The Cultural Days serve this purpose, stimulating reflections on our shared roots. They offer an opportunity to become familiar with the cultural heritage of the nations of Europe, to appreciate their fruitful differences, to comprehend their similarities, to grasp the full sense of our common Europe. Culture is fundamental to making the European Union a living reality. The diverse forms in which it is expressed, crossing borders, create channels for mutual understanding and forge a common feeling of belonging, over and above origin or language.

We are now at the ninth edition of the Days, and certainly one of the reasons for the growing success of the initiative is the enthusiastic participation of the Frankfurt public, the primary audience. Let me thank you straight off for your attention to this dialogue. This year, there is perhaps an additional reason to spark the city's interest: Frankfurt is the city of Goethe, the "universal" man of the Enlightenment whose *Italienische Reise* was an essential bridge between the culture of Germany and that of the *Land wo die Zitronen blühen*.

The programme for these Days revisits our cultural heritage, our artistic and historical legacy, but it also reflects the culture and cultural activities of present-day Italy. Classical music is the centrepiece of the opening and closing concerts as well as the charity event, but there will also be presentations of contemporary Italian music. The Italian film days are entirely given over to contemporary directors and will offer the opportunity to reflect on the ways in which the traditional Italian family model has changed. In literature, the themes range from the deeper meaning of cultural identity to the role of women in the *Risorgimento*.

This evening the Orchestra Mozart will perform the opening concert under the baton of Claudio Abbado. The Maestro's career, his essential embodiment of the universal language of music, certainly needs no presentation. I cannot even begin to sum up the course of his art. Let me merely recall that he has conducted some of the world's greatest orchestras: the Berliner Philharmoniker, the Wiener Philharmoniker, La Scala. Constantly engaged with social problems and active in promoting the artistic growth and careers of young musicians, Claudio Abbado has founded a series of orchestras for young instrumentalists of artistic excellence,

including notably the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and the Orchestra Mozart, which came into being in Bologna. Both draw their players from a vast range of different countries, talented young musicians playing alongside established soloists.

The Orchestra Mozart owes its name to the role that the city of Bologna played in Mozart's development. It was with the Philharmonic Academy of Bologna – one of the centres of European cultural life – that Mozart, at the age of fourteen, took his diploma as “*maestro compositore*” on the 9th of October 1770.

Music as solidarity, music as social life, music as at once expression of and factor in personal and cultural growth. These are the values that Claudio Abbado and all these young musicians have brought with them to the Orchestra Mozart, from the very start. Now, it is my pleasure to leave you to the sublime art of Gioacchino Rossini. Claudio Abbado conducts the Orchestra Mozart in the Overture to the Barber of Seville.