

PRESS RELEASE

RE-SPHERE launches to transform Europe's shared heritage into a catalyst for dialogue, reconciliation and peace



New Horizon Europe project brings together 13 partners from 9 countries to explore how Shared Holy Places can strengthen social cohesion, intercultural understanding and sustainable peacebuilding across Europe

Thessaloniki, Greece, 17 June 2026 – Across Europe, cultural and religious heritage has long reflected both shared histories and complex pasts. While many places have witnessed division and conflict, they also hold the potential to become spaces of encounter, dialogue and reconciliation. Understanding how this potential can be unlocked lies at the heart of **RE-SPHERE – Shared Places for Heritage, Encounter and Reconciliation in Europe**, a new Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Action that officially launched with its Consortium Kick-off Meeting on **17 June 2026** at the [Aristotle University of Thessaloniki \(AUTh\)](#), Greece.

Funded by the European Union under **Horizon Europe** with an EU contribution of **€3,289,842.03** (Grant Agreement No. **101287628**), RE-SPHERE started on **1 June 2026** and will run for **36 months**,

until **31 May 2029**. The project brings together **13 partners from 9 countries**, combining expertise in cultural heritage, religious studies, peace and conflict research, digital technologies, political science, law, social sciences and stakeholder engagement to develop innovative approaches that transform **Shared Holy Places (SHPs)** into drivers of peacebuilding and social cohesion.

Rethinking shared heritage for a more peaceful Europe

Across Southeastern Europe and neighbouring regions, churches, mosques, synagogues, monasteries, shrines and other Shared Holy Places have served communities of different faiths and cultures for centuries. These sites represent not only important cultural landmarks but also living spaces where identities, memories and traditions intersect.

RE-SPHERE seeks to better understand how these places can contribute to reconciliation in societies affected by historical tensions and contemporary challenges. By combining interdisciplinary research with digital innovation, artistic expression and participatory governance, the project will generate new knowledge, practical tools and evidence-based policy recommendations that support heritage-led peacebuilding.

The project aligns closely with European priorities on cultural heritage, democracy, social inclusion and sustainable development, recognising heritage as a powerful resource for fostering mutual understanding rather than division.

From research to real-world impact

Rather than focusing solely on documenting heritage, RE-SPHERE aims to create practical solutions that can benefit policymakers, cultural institutions, heritage professionals, religious communities, civil society organisations and local communities.

Among its key results, the project will develop:

- the first **geo-referenced Atlas of Shared Holy Places**, documenting more than 150 sites across seven countries
- a new interdisciplinary framework for understanding and governing Shared Holy Places
- an interactive digital platform and mobile application featuring immersive storytelling technologies
- community-driven exhibitions and youth-led cultural initiatives
- a Digital Diplomacy and Shared Holy Places Management Manual
- policy recommendations and governance tools supporting heritage-based reconciliation.

Through these outputs, RE-SPHERE will demonstrate how cultural heritage can actively contribute to resilience, intercultural dialogue and sustainable peacebuilding while strengthening the role of local communities in safeguarding Europe's shared heritage.

Official launch in Thessaloniki

The project officially began with its Consortium Kick-off Meeting hosted by the **Aristotle University of Thessaloniki** on **17 June 2026**.

The meeting brought together project partners from across Europe, both in person and online, to establish a common vision for the project and coordinate the first implementation phase.

Throughout the day, consortium members discussed:

- the overall scientific vision and expected societal impact of RE-SPHERE;
- project governance and management procedures;
- work package objectives, responsibilities and timelines;
- communication, dissemination and stakeholder engagement strategies;
- exploitation planning and intellectual property considerations;
- priorities and milestones for the project's first six months.



The Kick-off Meeting also provided an opportunity for partners to strengthen collaboration, align methodologies and establish the foundations for the interdisciplinary work that will take place over the coming three years.

A collaborative European consortium

RE-SPHERE brings together universities, research organisations, cultural institutions, non-governmental organisations and technology partners with complementary expertise spanning heritage research, peace studies, digital humanities, social sciences and technological innovation.

The consortium includes partners from Greece, Switzerland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, Romania, Luxembourg, Bulgaria, Finland and North Macedonia, creating a unique multidisciplinary ecosystem capable of addressing the complex relationship between cultural heritage, identity, dialogue and reconciliation.

What happens next

Following the Kick-off Meeting, the consortium will begin its first implementation phase, focusing on stakeholder engagement, research preparation and the development of common methodologies across all work packages.



Initial activities will include establishing the project's governance framework, preparing fieldwork across participating countries, engaging local communities and heritage stakeholders, defining technical specifications for the project's digital platform, and launching the first communication and dissemination activities.

Over the coming months, RE-SPHERE will also begin building its network of stakeholders, laying the foundations for long-term collaboration with policymakers, cultural institutions, religious communities, researchers, civil society organisations and citizens.

Project Partners

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece), World Council of Churches (Switzerland), University of Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Simon Kuznets Kharkiv National University of Economics (Ukraine), Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (Romania), University of Luxembourg (Luxembourg), Uzhhorod National University (Ukraine), Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (Bulgaria), Centre for Research and Technology Hellas (CERTH) (Greece), Finn Church Aid (Finland), Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments and Museum – Ohrid (North Macedonia), ViLabs (Greece), and the Athens City Museum – Vouros-Eutaxias Foundation (Greece).

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