The official welcome session today is unusually crowded, and I think this testifies to the relevance and the innovative nature of the event.

Because of the many distinguished speakers called to this podium, I wish to limit my address to a few brief sentences.

To start, in sharing Andrea Simoncini's words, I would like to add my personal warm greetings to all the participants and the audience here for this conference. A very special thank you goes to the organizers: Andrea Pessina and Jennifer Celani of the *Soprintendenza* on the one hand; Alessandra De Luca, Lucrezia Palandri and Giacomo Pailli, friends and colleagues in the Comparative section of the Department of Legal Sciences, on the other. Lastly, but certainly not less important, my deepest gratitude goes also to the prestigious institutions that, in various ways, generously supported the conference.

The subtitle of the conference reads *A Dialogue with the United States*.

As a comparatist, a dialogic approach is inherent to my research method. Comparative research is necessarily a cooperative effort, which tends to bridge the gaps of understanding across different legal traditions; and today's conference is intensely comparative because it not only favors the dialogue between a common law and a civil law system, but it also connects different actors playing on the scene of the cultural heritage law: scholars, private and public administrators, persons working in museums and foundations, practicing lawyers.

More specifically, the conference dialogue is between Italy and the United States. The reasons for this 'duo', for choosing these two countries are many and some I already mentioned. Moreover, I imagine that the reasons and the importance of this choice will be part of the presentations and debate that will take place today and tomorrow. But let me just recall and therefore add a few considerations.

In the first place, the fascination, the enchantment of Americans and Italians for their respective cultures – a fascination that generated a privileged link between the US and Italy, and especially between the US and Firenze. Then the considerable amount of US involvement and investment in this country. In addition, the relevance of American scholarship on cultural heritage law; on this last point I cannot avoid mentioning a pioneer of the studies on cultural heritage law: John Henry Merryman, who inaugurated the first course on 'art and the law' at Stanford back in 1970, and Merryman was, needless to say, a great comparatist scholar.

If a relational attitude is a significant aspect of the comparative legal theory, it is even more so in my personal heritage: American mother and Italian father. I learned at a young age that dialogue between cultures is essential to make complex situations work efficiently (what is more complex than family relations…?).

In the end, I hope that today's conference will facilitate the understanding between Italy and the United States in the complicated, intensely regulated, and ever-expanding field of cultural heritage law and, through a more accurate knowledge, contribute building a stronger and productive cooperation between the two shores of the Atlantic.

Vittoria Barsotti
Chaired Professor of Comparative Law
University of Florence