

## Protection of cultural heritage in armed conflicts

### SUMMARY

Cultural heritage is vulnerable. Composed of historic buildings, monuments and artefacts of artistic, historic, religious, scientific or technological importance, it contributes to national identities, but can be destroyed in military conflict. The value and rarity of many cultural artefacts exposes them to human greed: they are vulnerable – especially during times of conflict – to being illegally removed from archaeological sites, stolen from museums, trafficked and sold to private collections.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco), the International Council on Monuments and Sites, the World Customs Organization and the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) are all involved in the implementation of international conventions on cultural heritage, such as the 1954 Hague Convention and the 1972 Unesco Convention. They also monitor compliance with the 1954 Convention's Second Protocol protecting cultural heritage, and the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (Unidroit) Convention on trafficking of artefacts.

The European Union contributes to these efforts, providing financial support to civil society and international organisations in this field, and organising specialised training courses, meetings, and networks for those involved in protecting EU cultural heritage. It condemns destruction and looting of cultural heritage, and prohibits illicit trade in cultural goods.

The scale and brutality of cultural heritage destruction in Syria and Iraq calls for reflection on further measures to protect cultural heritage.



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## Destruction of cultural heritage in armed conflicts

The current armed conflicts in Syria and Iraq, and other countries such as Yemen, Mali, and Nigeria, have brought the destruction and looting of cultural heritage in their wake. Archaeological sites at Palmyra in Syria and Nimrud in Iraq are currently among the most visible heritage sites being destroyed in regions at war, but the wilful destruction of cultural heritage or artefacts is by no means a new feature of warfare.

### Definition of cultural heritage

Unesco defines [cultural heritage](#) as 'the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations'. In the context of war, destruction and looting, this briefing deals solely with tangible cultural heritage.

### Cultural cleansing

Destruction directed at a particular population, or against its memory, history and art, is referred to as '[cultural cleansing](#)'. However, such actions target the whole of humanity, since cultural heritage is humankind's common history. In Syria and Iraq, the [industrial scale](#) of artefact looting and illegal archaeological excavations that accompanies the destruction of heritage sites feeds into large scale [trafficking](#) by organised crime networks. Together with drugs and petrol, cultural goods are a source of [funding for ISIL/Da'esh](#) terrorist activities, allowing the prolongation of armed conflicts.

### Destruction of cultural heritage

Cultural heritage is vulnerable to natural [disasters](#), such as the earthquake that destroyed Unesco world cultural heritage in Nepal in April 2015, or to human-made hazards, such as fire. During armed conflicts, destruction of cultural heritage can be [unintentional or intentional](#). This distinction is essential, since the latter is legally pursued as a [war crime](#) under the International Criminal Court's Rome Statute (see below). Massive deliberate destruction of cultural heritage is also often a preliminary accompaniment to [massive killings](#).

### Trafficking of cultural heritage

Cultural heritage artefacts from illegal archaeological excavations or looting, which are in demand by investors or collectors, find their way onto the art markets, where they are placed, via auctions or internet sales, by criminal groups. Such trafficking, both by organised crime networks and by impoverished populations, constitutes a standalone activity in peacetime, or results from wartime destruction of heritage sites or looting.

## International conventions on cultural heritage

### Preventing destruction of cultural heritage

#### *Protection and preservation*

World War II resulted in a heavy toll of massive destruction of cultural sites and looting of art objects throughout Europe and around the world. It revealed the shortcomings of previous conventions, such as the [1899 Hague Convention](#) (prohibiting the deliberate bombardment and destruction of heritage sites or looting of cultural property), the [1907 Hague Convention \(IV\)](#) and the [1935 Treaty](#) on the Protection of Artistic and Scientific Institutions and Historic Monuments.

Post-war, the **1954 Hague Convention** ([Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property](#) in the Event of Armed Conflict) was the first legal framework to set rules on how to identify cultural property to be protected, how to mark it (with an

internationally recognised emblem – a **blue shield**), how to register its protection under the Convention, and how to evacuate the property should it be threatened by damage.

[The International Committee of the Blue Shield](#) was founded in 1996 to help implement the blue shield provisions. The Committee gathers non-governmental organisations (NGOs) dealing with museums, archives, audiovisual supports, libraries, monuments and sites. It allows them to share knowledge and experience, and coordinate efforts concerning emergency situations. In 2008 the [Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield](#) was established to facilitate communication between national committees and all levels of blue shield networks, to promote training for peacekeepers, and to support the creation of a database of specialists agreed by both Unesco and combatants from war zones.

To date, 126 states have ratified or accessed the Convention, with the United States and Palestine among the last to sign – in 2009 and 2012 respectively. However, the symbol is still not widely recognised: in 2003 the US army in Iraq lacked [specialists](#) trained in cultural heritage. As a result the American army built a [military base](#) on the site of ancient Babylon and Ur, and caused irreparable damage.

#### *Evacuation and restitution*

The 1954 Convention provided for the possibility of, and a procedure for, the evacuation of endangered cultural heritage. Its accompanying **Protocol (1954)** provides for the restitution of cultural property placed in another country for protection (see box).

#### *Enhanced protection and assistance*

After destruction of world heritage took place during the war in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (1990) and the first Gulf War (1991); the **1999 Second Protocol to the Hague Convention of 1954** introduced the notion of enhanced protection for cultural heritage of the greatest importance for humanity. The [Second Protocol](#) entered into force in 2004. It clarifies

states' duties during peacetime concerning the safeguarding of collections and inventories to facilitate their recovery; planning of emergency measures; and legal instruments on removal for protection and responsible bodies.

The [1972 Unesco Convention](#) concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage provides for a world heritage site to be included on a [list](#) (the **List of World Heritage in Danger**), at the outbreak of, or in case of potential danger of, armed conflict. It allows for the Unesco World Heritage Committee to immediately [allocate assistance](#) in order to preserve or rehabilitate such sites.

#### *Penal measures*

The **International Criminal Court's Rome Statute**, adopted in [1998](#), established the first treaty-based permanent International Court of Justice to hear cases of persons accused of the most serious crimes of international concern, such as genocide; crimes against humanity; and war crimes. Article 8 establishes its jurisdiction in respect to war crimes, including the destruction of historic, religious, scientific, or artistic buildings. As of March 2016, Syria and Iraq are not among the [124 countries](#) parties to the treaty.

#### **Example of evacuation: the Prado**

The evacuation of the [Prado museum](#) collections during the Spanish civil war and its restitution is an early example of evacuation. The collections were evacuated from Madrid, where the museum was under heavy bombing, and moved to Figueras. As the front approached, in February 1939, the collections were transported to the League of Nations headquarters in Geneva. During the summer they were shown to the public, and then returned to Madrid in September 1939, once the civil war was over.

### Conventions against looting and trafficking of cultural heritage

The **1970 Unesco Convention** on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property resulted from concerns about states' responsibility for the protection of cultural property on their territory against looting and trafficking, in the context of the growing market demand for, and the illicit trade in, cultural heritage artefacts. The [Convention](#) addresses the public law perspective (it refers to legal responsibilities and the obligations of a state or the public in general). It includes provisions on the establishment of inventories, export certificates, monitoring of the trade in cultural and art objects, penal or administrative sanctions, and restitution. It advocates capacity-building measures for police and customs and provides a framework for international cooperation. The text establishes the responsibility of those who engage in illegal trade of cultural property looted from occupied territories, provides for the implementation of export and import control systems and art dealers' legal obligations to keep a register proving each item's origin.

The 1995 [Unidroit Convention](#) (The International Institute for the Unification of Private Law on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects) establishes the responsibilities of occupying powers to protect cultural property in occupied zones. It complements the 1970 Convention with aspects of private law, covering individuals' legal obligations and responsibilities in cases when individual owners acquire stolen or illegally exported cultural property. It provides for compensation in case of the return of the questionable artefact, once the purchaser's good faith is proved.

#### Ratification by EU Member States

Only the Rome Statute and the 1972 Convention have been ratified by all EU Member States. The 1954 Hague Convention was ratified by all Member States except for Ireland, Malta and Latvia. Together with Portugal, Sweden, France and the United Kingdom they have not ratified the second Protocol either. The first Protocol lacks the signatures of Ireland, Malta and the United Kingdom. As concerns heritage trafficking: the Unidroit Convention has been ratified by 22 EU Member States, and the 1970 Unesco Convention by 16.

### Protection of cultural heritage by the United Nations and international bodies: the examples of Syria and Iraq

Specialised international organisations are responsible for implementing and monitoring the implementation of the above-mentioned conventions. Currently, these organisations play a particularly important role in efforts to prevent destruction, looting and trafficking of cultural heritage in the case of war zones in Syria and Iraq.

#### United Nations resolutions

Reacting to the situation in Iraq, in 2003 the United Nations (UN) Security Council adopted [Resolution 1483](#), which includes a ban on trafficking in cultural objects illegally removed from Iraq since its invasion of Kuwait, and a call to facilitate their return. On 12 February 2015, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted [Resolution 2199](#), condemning the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage by terrorists in Iraq and Syria, and the looting and smuggling of heritage artefacts to finance terrorist activities.

#### United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco)

[Unesco](#) and its [World Heritage Committee](#) are responsible for the implementation of the 1972 Convention, registrations on the List of the World Heritage in Danger, and the management of the World Heritage Fund. Unesco is tasked with coordination of national and international efforts to prevent illicit trafficking. Through its activities

concerning [heritage at risk](#) due to armed conflicts or natural disasters, it mobilises the international community in case of emergency actions.

Unesco has been particularly concerned with the destruction of cultural heritage in armed conflicts in [Iraq](#) and [Syria](#). In December 2014, a Unesco [meeting](#) focused on the links between cultural heritage destruction and the [persecution of minority populations](#), cultural cleansing, and between the protection of cultural heritage and security in both countries.

At a roundtable debate in June 2015, Unesco supported the [Italian government](#)'s suggestion to task 'blue helmet' peacekeeping forces with heritage protection missions. On 16 February 2016 it [signed](#) an agreement with the Italian government, establishing a cultural task force composed of cultural heritage experts, archaeologists, art detectives, historians and restorers, and Italian specialised military police. The 30-person task force is ready to intervene in emergency situations and a specialised training centre has been established in Turin.

#### **Syrian and Iraqi heritage specialists' efforts**

Since the beginning of the Iraqi war in 2003, the staff of the [National Museum in Baghdad](#) has protected and evacuated its artefacts, thus preserving most of the collection from looting.

In August 2015, the Unesco Director-General saluted the courage of two famous [Syrian archaeologists](#) from Palmyra who were brutally killed by ISIL/Da'esh terrorists because they had refused to reveal the hiding place of ancient Syrian artefacts.

Unesco Director-General, Irina Bokova, has voiced concerns regarding the escalation of damage to cultural heritage. In December 2014, Bokova called for the creation of [protected cultural zones](#) around heritage sites, such as the World Heritage City of Aleppo in Syria; and condemned destruction of cultural heritage, such as those in [Nimrud](#) (Iraq) in March 2015, or of the Triumphal Arch in [Palmyra](#) (Syria) in October 2015.

An April 2015 Unesco [meeting](#) focused on Resolution 2199 implementation through strengthening cooperation and exchanges of information. Since 2004 the [International Coordination Committee](#) for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of Iraq has focused on its heritage preservation, through awareness-raising campaigns and conferences on heritage looting and trafficking.

In 2012, Unesco's Iraqi office prepared three TV advertisements on the protection of cultural property and on trafficking as a terrorist financial resource. Local TV channels showed the films to raise awareness of the consequences of cultural heritage looting and trafficking, and to inform viewers how to prevent these illegal activities. Some of these campaigns are published on [Youtube](#) and target local populations in Iraq and Syria.

Concerning the illicit trafficking of cultural heritage in particular, in March 2013, Unesco organised [regional training](#) for Syria, and later established an [Emergency Response Action Plan](#) (ERAP) for Iraq in July 2014. ERAP's aim is, among other things, to enforce the ban on trafficking in cultural objects put in place by UN Security Council [Resolution 1483](#) of 2003. Similar activities to help [Syria](#) to preserve its cultural heritage have been in place since November 2014.

In March 2015, Unesco initiated the [#Unite4Heritage](#) worldwide social media campaign to protect endangered cultural heritage, aiming to encourage participants to [contribute](#) financially or to volunteer for cultural heritage protection projects. It accompanied a [joint initiative](#) 'Protecting Cultural Heritage – An Imperative for Humanity' organised jointly with Interpol and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, to encourage international

organisations, states and partners to support cultural heritage from intentional destruction and trafficking.

However, destroyed or damaged sites or artefacts can be restored, as witnessed by Unesco's bid to [reconstruct](#) the Samarra archaeological site in Iraq.

#### **International Council on Monuments and Sites (Icomos)**

[Icomos](#), the World Heritage Committee's advisory body on the implementation of the 1972 Convention, is an international NGO dedicated to the conservation of heritage sites all over the world. It contributes to Unesco's efforts concerning Iraqi and Syrian cultural heritage. Its experts, among others from its Task Force on Iraq and Syria, contribute to debates and conferences on cultural heritage issues, such as the [roundtable](#) debate organised by Unesco: 'Despoiled and Destroyed: Ancient Civilizations of Iraq and Syria', or the debate on '[Heritage in Armed Conflict](#) – Syria and Iraq' organised by Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences (New Jersey, USA) in December 2015.

#### **International Council of Museums (ICOM)**

[ICOM](#), a network of museum professionals, publishes a [red list of endangered art works](#) or archaeological objects located in territories in difficult conditions, to prevent the sale or export of stolen items by facilitating their identification. In 2003, ICOM established one of its first Emergency Red Lists: [Iraqi Antiquities](#) (updated in 2015). The [Syrian cultural heritage](#) Emergency Red List followed in 2013, and the most recent list, for [Libya](#), was published in December 2015.

#### **International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM)**

[ICCROM](#) is an intergovernmental organisation responsible for the [Disaster Risk Management Programme](#), as well as for training to assess and reduce the impact of the risks facing cultural heritage. In 2012, together with the United Arab Emirates, ICCROM founded the [ATHAR](#) Regional Conservation Centre, which organised a [workshop](#) in Cairo on capacity-building for cultural heritage risk management in emergency situations, including in Iraq, in 2015.

#### **Syrian cultural heritage evacuation**

In September 2015, [Switzerland](#) offered to protect, on its soil, Syrian cultural treasures, as it did in 1939 for the Prado Museum collections. It was joined in October 2015 by [Russia](#), which proposed the evacuation of Syrian artefacts including items of Orthodox Church heritage.

#### **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**

[UNODC's mandate](#) on organised crime covers the illicit trafficking of cultural property. It offers advisory services and technical assistance in crime prevention and criminal justice responses. It developed International [Guidelines](#) for Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Responses with Respect to Trafficking in Cultural Property and Other Related Offences, adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2014 and annexed to [Resolution 69/196](#). These non-binding guidelines focus on prevention strategies, criminal justice policies, related law enforcement and judicial cooperation.

As concerns the situation in Iraq and Syria, in November 2015, the UNODC participated in the sixth session of the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption, held in St Petersburg (Russia). The UNODC contributed a paper on 'Criminal justice responses in the field of anti-corruption in countering trafficking in cultural property' and estimated the [illicit financial flows](#) related to transnational crime in art and cultural property at 0.8% of all such flows. It stressed the need for closer cooperation with civil society, awareness-raising campaigns, higher levels of requirement for due diligence, strengthening of civil, administrative and penal

measures, preventive regulations concerning the use of legitimate markets to trade in illicit cultural heritage artefacts, better exchange of information, and stronger international cooperation mechanisms among enforcement and prosecution services.

#### **World Customs Organization (WCO)**

[WCO](#) manages a [programme on prevention of trafficking of cultural property](#), and is responsible for the prevention of cultural heritage trafficking, which it considers as organised crime and money laundering. WCO facilitates identification of the suspected stolen items, and the exchange of information through the Customs Enforcement Network Communication Platform ([CENcomm](#)). It provides a model export certificate for cultural objects, which is required in order to allow an artefact to leave the territory. However, [false certificates](#) or [fake data](#) provided to obtain a certificate impede progress in the fight against trafficking. In March 2012, WCO called for increased [border vigilance](#) regarding Syrian cultural heritage, and awareness-raising concerning the risk that cultural heritage is stolen and trafficked in conflict situations. Smuggled artefacts recovered in criminal investigations or by custom officers are to be returned, as are [Iraqi antiquities](#) from Baghdad removed by the US.

#### **International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol)**

[Interpol](#) organises [meetings](#) and [workshops](#), and international police cooperation, as well as encouraging the exchange of information among national police, antique dealers and antique or art owners. It also publishes a [database](#) of stolen artefacts, facilitating their identification. Interpol called for vigilance in May 2012, concerning Syrian [mosaics stolen](#) from the ruins of Afameya in the city of Hama, attracting attention to the artefacts.

#### **International Criminal Court (ICC)**

According to Article 8 of its Statute the [ICC](#) has the mandate to investigate the allegedly committed destruction of cultural heritage, considered a war crime. Its prosecutors can initiate an investigation if asked to do so by a state party to the Statute of Rome or by the UN Security Council. In September 2015, [the first case](#) opened before the ICC concerning, as the main charge, the destruction of historical and religious monuments in Timbuktu (Mali). Syria and Iraq are not parties to the Rome Statute and thus ICC has [no geographical jurisdiction](#) over them. However, perpetrators of war crimes in Syria and Iraq who are citizens of other countries party to the Statute can be pursued.

### **EU police and judicial cooperation**

Established under the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, [Europol](#) ([Article 88](#)) and [Eurojust](#) ([Article 85](#)), are intermediary bodies between Member States' national police, for the former, and judicial authorities, for the latter. They help to fight cross-border organised crime, which includes trafficking and illegal trade in cultural heritage.

Europol can establish a [joint investigation team](#) for such crimes. Its Secure Information Exchange Network Application ([SIENA](#)) allows the swift exchange of operational information and intelligence on crime between Europol, Member States and third parties. In the framework of the EU-US agreement 'Terrorist Finance Tracking Programme' ([TFTP](#)), in force since August 2010, it assesses the request for data and the scope of the exchange of intelligence related to counter-terrorism.

### **EU support for the protection of Syrian and Iraqi cultural heritage**

#### **Financial support**

With EU financial support from the Prevention of and Fight against Crime [Programme](#) (ISEC) the [Observatory](#) on Illicit Traffic in Cultural Goods, ICOM's collaborative platform

has been operating since 2013. It is the first information databank of statistical data, [case studies](#) and [analyses](#) on Iraq and Syria, among others. The ISEC programme also supported an Italian-led project on a 'Protection System for Cultural Heritage' ([PSYCHE](#)). Launched in 2012, it improved Interpol's database on stolen works of art to facilitate data insertion and information searches regarding stolen items. A volunteer initiative, [Project Mosul](#), dedicated to cultural heritage, was partly financed from the EU research-funding programme, Marie Skłodowska-Curie. It developed 3D reconstructions of damaged cultural artefacts and heritage.

In 2013, the EU allocated [€2.5 million](#) for a three-year Unesco project: '[Emergency Safeguarding of Syrian Cultural Heritage](#)'. Put in place together with institutional partners (ICCROM and Icomos) on 1 March 2014 to halt the destruction of cultural heritage it contributed to the organisation of an international [meeting of experts](#) in May 2014 at Unesco headquarters. Its participants [called](#) for the creation of an online platform to share information on cultural heritage destruction and lootings – the [Observatory of Syrian Cultural Heritage](#).

#### *EU funding for civil society projects*

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, [Euromed](#), covered all EU Member States and 10 southern Mediterranean and Middle East countries. It did not include Iraq, and Syria was [suspended](#) in May 2011. The partnership, covering among other things culture, included a cultural heritage programme under the label '[Euromed Heritage](#)'. The EU funding also supported awareness-raising projects not initially intended for cultural heritage.

#### **Syrian civil society**

According to the Syrian Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums, [Syrian civil society](#) rescued Byzantine mosaic panels from looting. [Unesco](#) also reports on civil society involvement in cultural heritage protection.

Between 2010 and 2013 a series of events was supported, such as a conference in Italy on the [role of civil society](#) in the preservation of cultural heritage in the Mediterranean region under the [Euromed Heritage 4](#) programme, and a debate in Morocco on the [recommendations on the future](#) of the heritage of the Mediterranean region, citizen ownership of cultural heritage, and its inclusion in preservation strategy.

Thanks to the Euromed-funded awareness-raising project for youth, '[Hammamed](#)', Syrians saved decorative mosaics from destruction by armed forces. The 2009-2011 programme focused on *hammams* as a common cultural heritage in the Mediterranean.

Currently [Euromed cooperation](#) in cultural heritage still does not cover Syria and Iraq. However, the [Archeomed](#) neighbourhood programme is also devoted to the protection and promotion of the cultural heritage in the southern Mediterranean.

#### **European Commission**

A [study](#) (2011) on preventing and fighting illicit trafficking in cultural goods in the EU, commissioned by the Commission, points to the need for EU provisions on [online sales](#) and for a definition of the traffic in cultural artefacts as a [specific criminal offence](#). No EU Member State has such a definition, nor provisions to help prevent and combat trafficking. The Commission Implementing Decision on the 2013 Special Measure for the Syrian population included [measures to safeguard](#) Syrian cultural heritage. It provided for a joint Action Plan for the protection of Syrian cultural heritage that consisted of awareness-raising campaigns, illicit traffic prevention, and safeguarding measures.

The Commission's Directorate-General for [Education and Culture](#) website provides an insight into trafficking in cultural goods and EU counter-actions. It lists possible EU-level work on harmonising terminology and legal definitions, coherent legislation among

Member States, information exchange and a comprehensive database on trafficking in cultural goods.

In February 2015, the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy issued a joint [communication](#), 'Elements for an EU regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the Da'esh threat' condemning the massive destruction of, and trafficking in, Syrian and Iraqi cultural heritage. It called on Iraq to accede to the Rome Statute to enable prosecutions for cultural heritage war crimes.

In November 2015 European Commissioner Tibor Navracsics announced to Culture Ministers in the Council (see below) that a study and impact assessment on the import of trafficked cultural heritage items would be launched in 2016, focusing on the scale of the phenomenon, as well as fiscal and customs issues. He pointed to the lack of homogeneity of provisions on this issue within the EU and the need to assess whether any EU legislation is required. On 2 February 2016, the Commission presented its [Action Plan](#) to strengthen the fight against terrorist financing. The Commission is to consider future measures concerning [illegal trade](#) in cultural goods.

### Council

In July 2003 the Council adopted Regulation (EC) No [1210/2003](#) prohibiting import, export or dealing in Iraqi cultural property or archaeological, historical, cultural, rare scientific and religious artefacts (unless exported prior to 1990).

The October 2012 Foreign Affairs Council conclusions on Syria expressed [concerns](#) about the destruction of Syrian cultural heritage. A [resolution](#) on the creation of an informal network of law enforcement authorities and expertise in the field of cultural goods (EU CULTNET) was thus also adopted in October 2012. The network's objective is to improve the exchange of information related to the prevention of illicit trade in cultural goods and to identify and share information on criminal networks suspected of being involved in illicit trade. EU CULTNET also aims to combat these crimes and their perpetrators by uncovering links between trafficking in artefacts and other organised crime, and investigating their operations.

In December 2013, more than a year before UN Resolution 2199, the Council adopted Decision [2013/760/CFSP](#) and Regulation (EU) No [1332/2013](#) prohibiting import, transfer or export of Syrian cultural property or artefacts of cultural, scientific, artistic or religious heritage (unless exported prior to 9 May 2011).

Following a [consultation](#) by the Dutch Presidency in the [Cultural Affairs working party](#) on 12 November 2015 on the destruction and trafficking of cultural heritage, on 24 November, [EU Culture Ministers](#) gathered in Brussels to discuss relevant measures. They decided to focus on legal measures, such as controls and sanctions, training for customs officers, and the promotion of heritage protection and restoration through new technologies and digitisation. The French, German and Italian Culture Ministers

#### French proposals for EU actions

In November 2015, the Director of the Louvre Museum presented a [report](#) on the protection of humanity's cultural heritage in armed conflicts. It highlights the need to combat the illegal trade in artefacts and offers ideas for EU action: the creation of a European Observatory of Coordination and Monitoring of illegal trafficking in cultural goods; a unique database of such stolen or recovered items; or a European cooperation platform and European workshops on protection of cultural goods. It suggests the simplification and harmonisation of European regulations on the circulation of cultural goods, illegal trade in such stolen items, and the general use of standardised export certificates among all EU Member States.

urged the Commission to propose a regulation on the illegal import of cultural property in the EU.

The Fourth EU-Africa summit [declaration](#) in 2014 also includes provisions on joint efforts to combat trafficking in cultural goods within an EU cultural cooperation programmes.

### European Parliament

The European Parliament (EP) Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) covers all the cultural aspects of the EU and thus cultural heritage. CULT in July 2015 organised a [hearing](#) on cultural heritage destruction and trafficking. During the hearing, Unesco, Interpol, ICC, ICCROM specialists and the international law community pointed to certain [problems](#), such as similarities between artefacts from the Near and Middle East. Advanced knowledge is required to make it easier for customs officers or purchasers to identify such items properly. The principle of purchasers' [good faith](#) was also questioned for cases of lasting conflicts.

Parliament's April 2015 Resolution on the [destruction of cultural sites](#) perpetrated by ISIL/Da'esh called for international cooperation to implement international conventions and resolutions, the inclusion of civil society in international projects on protecting endangered cultural goods, for geospatial technologies projects (such as an American Association for the Advancement of Science ([AAAS](#)) project on the use of a geographic information system for cultural heritage) to rapidly gather, analyse and disseminate crisis and emergency information, and for the support for research, like Project Mosul.

In June 2015, the EP resolution on the situation in Palmyra and the case of Mazen Darwish [condemned](#) the purposeful and systematic destruction of Palmyra. This exceptionally well-preserved ancient city, a Unesco World Heritage site, has been systematically targeted by terrorist cultural violence and government armed forces.

### Main references

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Raymond W. Baker, Shereen T. Ismael and Tareq Y. Ismael, [Cultural Cleansing in Iraq: Why Museums Were Looted, Libraries Burned and Academics Murdered](#), Pluto Press, 2010.

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