



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1419 Vienna, 20 April 2023

EU Statement in Response to the Secretary-General's Thematic Report on Trafficking of Cultural Property

1. We thank the Secretary General for this very timely thematic report on “*Combating the Trafficking of Cultural Property: Protecting our Heritage while Tackling Organised Crime*”.
2. Cultural heritage – tangible, intangible and natural – is a cultural legacy, which we receive from the past, which we live in the present, and which we will pass on to future generations. It is a public good and it is essential for safeguarding the identity of peoples. We completely agree with your assessment that cultural goods are of major cultural, artistic, historical and scientific importance. Therefore, trafficking in cultural goods can have a devastating and irreversible impact on cultural heritage.
3. Interpol counted over 850,000 artefacts seized globally in 2020. However, given that a large number of cases go undetected, the real scale of cultural goods trafficking remains unclear. We therefore share the Secretary General's concern regarding the gravity of this problem and welcome the Organisation's work in the field of awareness raising.
4. The European Union attaches great importance to preventing and combating trafficking in cultural property. The EU Action Plan against Trafficking in Cultural Goods, adopted by the European Commission in December 2022, aims to protect cultural heritage within and beyond the EU by improving the prevention and detection of crimes by market participants and cultural heritage institutions; strengthening law enforcement and judicial capabilities online and offline; and

boosting international cooperation, including with source and transit countries of cultural goods.

5. Cultural goods are particularly at risk in conflict zones. The EU deplores the deliberate destruction and damage of sites, institutions, and objects of cultural, significance in Ukraine by the Russian Federation, in an attempt to erase Ukraine's cultural identity. Against the backdrop of Russia's unprovoked, unjustified and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, the EU and its Member States will continue to support all measures aimed at safeguarding cultural goods in Ukraine through various means, including by providing assistance to protect and evacuate cultural goods. Important actions also include financial support to protecting buildings and collections, as well as support to cultural heritage professionals enabling them to continue their work in Ukraine. Furthermore, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism has been activated for the first time to provide assistance in the protection of cultural heritage.
6. Furthermore, we are also particularly worried about the risk of looting and illicit trafficking of Ukrainian cultural property. The UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property not only urges States Parties to take measures to prohibit and prevent the illicit trafficking of cultural property, but also addresses the return and restitution of cultural property. Both Ukraine and Russia ratified the Convention, in 1988.
7. Trafficking in cultural goods is a lucrative business for organised crime, in some cases for conflict parties, financial crime networks, and terrorists. As such, it must be tackled with a comprehensive view and requires close intra- and inter-agency cooperation.
8. We commend the OSCE for delivering real results in this area, including by the establishment of the Heritage Crime Task Force, a rapid response team that can provide immediate assistance in the event of an emerging case. The OSCE has been instrumental in helping public actors understand the *modus operandi* of criminals, sharing expertise and best practices through law enforcement trainings

and operations assistance, as well as promoting better coordination among relevant institutions.

9. The EU supports the OSCE in its efforts in this field and firmly believes that by deepening the cooperation among participating States and Partners for Cooperation, supporting Ukraine, empowering border security and law enforcement agencies, and strengthening partnerships with other international organisations, namely UNESCO, financial institutions and private sector actors, the Organisation will be able to deliver further added value. Furthermore, we appreciate the sustained focus on the nexus between trafficking of cultural property, money laundering and terrorism financing.
10. Madam Secretary General, the European Union highly values your and the TNTD's extensive work in combating the trafficking of cultural property. As this phenomenon requires constant attention and innovative solutions, we are looking forward to continuing cooperation with the OSCE.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ALBANIA*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA*, the Potential Candidate Country GEORGIA, and the EFTA country ICELAND, member of the European Economic Area, as well as ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.