

Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe

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I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

Diversity and an integrated approach to cultural heritage

1. welcomes the communication entitled *Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe*, which has the twofold objective of, firstly, assessing the economic and social spin-offs of cultural heritage and, secondly, highlighting the fact that Europe is at a turning point — that is to say, it has an opportunity to meet the challenges of the cultural sector with a strategic, global and integrated approach. The Committee particularly welcomes the emphasis the communication places on the importance of grasping opportunities for encouraging smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and the fact that it is calling for full use to be made of European funding earmarked for cultural heritage. The European Committee of the Regions shares the Commission's view that the exchange of best practice and ideas requires closer, better coordinated cooperation to be in place from the local level up to the European level, and to this end the Committee is proposing its collaboration here;

2. acknowledges the valuable work the Council of Europe has carried out over many years to the benefit of cultural heritage and calls for close cooperation to be kept up in both legislation and practice. On the topic of communication, the Committee would draw attention to the Faro framework-agreement on the protection of cultural heritage, which protects all forms of cultural heritage in Europe; together they constitute a common basis for remembrance, mutual understanding, identity, a sense of belonging and creativity ⁽¹⁾. At the same time, the CoR is closely following the UNESCO World Forum on culture and cultural industries, whose objectives are in synergy with the European Committee of the Regions stance according to which, as part of the post-2015 development programme, culture and cultural heritage should be fully integrated, fully respecting the subsidiarity principle ⁽²⁾;

3. underlines the importance of the role which all levels of government have to play, by actively involving the players concerned in the protection of and support for cultural heritage in Europe, as well as, given the challenges of the 21st century, in steps to take advantage of the diversity of cultural heritage to the benefit of economic recovery. According to the Lisbon Treaty, the EU is to respect its own rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced ⁽³⁾. The Union is to contribute to the flowering of Member States' cultures, while respecting their national and regional diversity and the subsidiarity principle, at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore ⁽⁴⁾. Cultural, historical and social diversity will flow from future innovation in economic, scientific, artistic and political domains, as well as in everyday life;

⁽¹⁾ Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, Faro, 27 October 2005.

⁽²⁾ *Florence Declaration, entitled Culture, Creativity and Sustainable Development. Research, Innovation, Opportunities* — Third edition of the UNESCO World Forum on Culture and Cultural Industries (FOCUS), 4 October 2014.

⁽³⁾ TEU Art 3(3).

⁽⁴⁾ TFEU Article 167.

4. stresses that cultural heritage is an integral part of the cultural and creative sectors; it is the sum of tangible, intangible and natural resources, goods and knowledge inherited from the past and it can help shape the face of municipalities, cities, towns and regions and significantly help to achieve the Europe 2020 strategy goals and strengthen social cohesion. Cultural heritage is a common value and shared asset which, when recognised as such, may help develop a vision for the future. Conservation of this heritage, its development and steps to guarantee its long-term future are a vocation, responsibility and shared goal. Concerning the protection and safeguarding of the cultural heritage of EU Member States, the Committee agrees with the communication in underlining the importance of Article 36 of the Treaty⁽⁵⁾, Council Regulation (EC) No 116/2009 on the export of cultural goods⁽⁶⁾, as well as Directive 2014/60/EU on the return of cultural objects unlawfully removed from the territory of a Member State;

5. feels that the role of cultural heritage is still undervalued. Indeed the proportion of State aid earmarked for cultural heritage goals has constantly been on the decrease. Given that cultural heritage has more than just economic value and that budgetary cuts can affect it, new ways of financing conservation of the European Union's immense cultural heritage must also be sought. Therefore the Committee welcomes the progress made by the European Commission in legislative measures, in enlarging — as part of moves to modernise rules on State aid — the scope of the general block exemption regulation⁽⁷⁾ for aid to promote culture and heritage conservation; this development recognises, on the one hand, the importance of cultural heritage as a factor in job creation and, on the other, its role in conveying the identities and values which make up a society: two features which should be taken into account when allocating State aid;

6. notes that natural heritage is an intrinsic part of cultural heritage and regrets that the communication makes no reference to it. Welcomes in this regard the fact that Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014⁽⁸⁾ clearly acknowledges that 'as natural heritage is often crucial to the shaping of artistic and cultural heritage, heritage conservation in the sense of this Regulation should be understood to cover also natural heritage linked to cultural heritage or formally recognised by the competent public authorities of a Member State';

7. welcomes the idea included in the recently revised directive 2014/52/EU on the assessment of the impact on the environment⁽⁹⁾, to the effect that it is also important to take account of the potential impact of public and private projects on cultural heritage. These European provisions could have the effect of encouraging measures adopted by local and regional authorities on culture as well as on integrated development and the feasibility of protecting and preserving cultural heritage as part of their complex urban and spatial development plans;

8. draws attention to the fact that the destruction of cultural property as well as unauthorised excavations and trafficking of cultural artefacts threaten the sustainability and protection of cultural heritage and remain an issue requiring collective action at European and international level. Such action requires open channels of communication and close cooperation involving EU Member States, as well as candidate and third countries. The Committee welcomes the introduction of the Internal Market Information System (IMI), established by Regulation (EU) No 1024/2012, and looks forward to the establishment of a module of the IMI system specifically customised for cultural objects, which should facilitate the implementation of Directive 2014/60/EU;

⁽⁵⁾ Article 36 of the Treaty foresees prohibitions or restrictions on imports, export or goods in transit for the protection of national treasures possessing artistic, historic or archaeological value.

⁽⁶⁾ Council Regulation (EC) No 116/2009 on the export of cultural goods lays down provisions to ensure that exports of cultural goods are subject to uniform controls at the Union's external borders. Cultural goods include, inter alia, direct products of excavations, finds or archaeological sites within a Member State.

⁽⁷⁾ Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty (for investment aid for culture and heritage conservation: EUR 100 million per project; for operating aid for culture and heritage conservation: EUR 50 million per undertaking per year).

⁽⁸⁾ Recital 72.

⁽⁹⁾ Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 amending Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment.

9. considers that the Commission should effectively address the lack of EU-wide data concerning the contribution of cultural heritage to economic growth and social cohesion. Therefore encourages the setting up and launch of a European data base to which the various projects devised for this purpose could contribute ⁽¹⁰⁾. It also encourages the development of standards that can be a base for making some cost-benefit analyses which can demonstrate the extent of the economic and social contribution of cultural heritage, pointing out the actual benefit of this heritage serving as a basis for additional conservation measures;

10. supports the open method of coordination (OMC) as part of the European agenda for culture, in that it structures cultural cooperation by means of strategic goals and facilitates communication between Member States, the spread of good practice and mutual learning. The CoR recommends examining, together with the European Commission, the possibility for the Committee also to be represented as of 2015 in the working groups provided for in the new work plan for culture. The Committee would reiterate, moreover, that national representatives should systematically consult local and regional stakeholders so that they can raise questions as reliably as possible ⁽¹¹⁾ and ensure that expertise, knowledge and experience built up at local and regional level, as well as creative and innovative proposals on results obtained in key areas, are turned to good use by publicising good practice;

Cultural heritage and identity

11. underlines the fact that cultural heritage is a cornerstone of local, regional, national and European identity. The conservation and protection thereof, as well as the strengthening of social identity at local and regional level, are key factors for sustainability, which will ensure that community values are preserved for future generation and that traditional features and knowledge survive in the long term. Cultural heritage is centred on society and plays a front-line role in the fight against poverty and social exclusion as it is a source of economic development and social cohesion. At the same time, familiarisation with cultural heritage at local and regional level should be part and parcel of all formal education curricula;

12. stresses that local cultural values — artistic, literary, audiovisual and architectural creation, creative work, contemporary culture, crafts, folklore, archaeological, historical, religious and ethnographic heritage, dialects, music, food and gastronomy, countryside and natural features, traditional expertise and knowledge, know-how, living traditions, etc. — are all closely linked to identity, which is rooted in the tangible, intangible and natural heritage of communities. The Committee would point out that developing culture at local level strengthens local identity and distinctiveness; the mix of different identities, based on mutual respect, also helps to create a common cultural heritage. Cultural products created in this way generate unique local value. These cultural factors are also important at European level ⁽¹²⁾;

13. emphasises that it is intangible cultural heritage that determines the identity of a region and that regional development is furthered by making good use of this. In cross-border and transnational cooperation, numerous examples have been recorded of good practice in devising strategies based on intangible cultural resources. By focusing on something that is unique and specific, such good practice alerts us to something people can be proud of, while making a region or district more attractive in terms of business competitiveness ⁽¹³⁾ and helping generate jobs;

14. points out that protecting cultural heritage does contribute towards developing a sense of identity by raising awareness of heritage values, by fostering a sense of belonging, by connecting to concepts of place-making and by the very fact of appreciating them. This can contribute to the development of social partnership and public-private partnerships, while constant efforts to conserve cultural heritage can help generate jobs and encourage the social economy. In this respect, it considers the exchange of expertise which takes place in other Member States with regard to classification and comprehensive protection of local heritage to be relevant;

⁽¹⁰⁾ The project mentioned in the Commission communication, entitled 'Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe: Towards a European Index for Valuing Cultural Heritage', could make a useful contribution to European-level data collection in the areas concerned, by compiling the findings of the research conducted at the national, regional, local and/or sectoral levels as part of a European mapping exercise.

⁽¹¹⁾ CdR 2391/2012 fin.

⁽¹²⁾ CdR 2391/2012 fin.

⁽¹³⁾ One example of transnational cooperation is the 2011-2014 *Cultural Capital Counts* project which brings together ten areas from six central European countries with the joint aim of promoting the region's development on the basis of its traditions, knowledge and know-how and highlighting its cultural heritage as part of this cooperation. The project is being co-financed by the ERDF and implemented as part of the *CENTRAL EUROPE programme*.

Cultural heritage as an economic resource

15. considers it important that the policy on the sustainable development of cultural heritage should have positive repercussions in the short, medium and long term for improvements to the economic situation and quality of life in the region concerned. Cultural heritage can also be a driving force for planning inclusive local and regional development and the development of creative industries, and contributes to economic growth by broadening access to cultural goods. One key element of competitiveness is openness to innovative solutions for cultural heritage preservation, implemented also through public-private partnerships;

16. stresses the need to do more to incorporate the cultural heritage sector, culture, creativity and related flagship initiatives into the revised Europe 2020 strategy, and to ensure that this strategy take account of elements demonstrating the contribution which cultural heritage makes to the economy;

17. considers it necessary for more resources to be made available to cultural and creative sectors linked to cultural heritage under the budget of the EU's new funds (e.g. the ERDF, ESF, EAFRD and EFF) and programmes (e.g. the Creative Europe programme and FP7) and that cultural heritage is better incorporated into the EU's new financial cycle for 2014-2020; welcomes in particular the mapping of cultural heritage actions in European Union policies and programmes⁽¹⁴⁾; recommends making full use of the EU's resources in order to draft and implement local and regional strategies for achieving creative, innovative goals. Furthermore, it remains essential for maximum synergy to be created between European funds and programmes so as to ensure effectiveness and efficiency. The European Commission is contributing to this through its guidelines on coordination, synergies and complementarity between the Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020 and other EU programmes managed directly by the Commission on research, innovation and competitiveness⁽¹⁵⁾;

18. underlines the fact that, as part of the development of regional economies and regional, territorial and urban development strategies and programmes, it strongly recommends that account be taken of: the conservation of cultures and cultural resources which embody value; the burden which the environment and the regions can cope with; and environmental protection-related considerations. Energy-efficient, environmentally- and nature-friendly intervention, measures and tools, which could avert the effects of natural disasters (such as floods), have an important role to play in mitigating the repercussions of climate change and in determining the effectiveness of development based on local and regional assets;

19. deems it important to take advantage of building heritage development, which can mean that heritage sites are given new functions as part of urban renewal measures and can make a contribution, with support from small and medium-sized enterprises, to employment and job creation. The professional credibility of buildings rehabilitation increases when the intervention is undertaken not only with traditional materials, but with traditional and contemporary techniques as well. This knowledge, as well as the monument itself, must be preserved and passed on, in the frame of professional training. Trained and specialised labour will be a demand on the market. At local and regional level, there are numerous exemplary practices supporting and promoting a creative environment, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by cultural diversity, and incorporating cultural strategies into local and regional development with a view to achieving Europe 2020 strategy goals, and the European Committee of the Regions is helping spread knowledge and share experience in this domain. These practical approaches and models favour the creation of a sustainable cultural ecosystem by encouraging creative entrepreneurship;

20. welcomes the fact that the Commission is highlighting — as part of the economic value of cultural heritage — the European construction industry and investment in the historic environment, both of which create jobs and help launch new economic activities; would encourage local and regional authorities to take part in the management of architectural heritage and historic buildings — often public buildings — and to make good use of them in a variety of ways so as to generate income and ensure they are maintained and sustainable; notes that the European capitals of culture programme also makes a major contribution to the conservation of architectural heritage and endows it with a new dimension; as part of this, a number of historic sites and urban districts could be revived in parallel to the process of managing and discussing industrial heritage and industrial wasteland;

⁽¹⁴⁾ European Commission — Mapping of Cultural Heritage actions in European Union policies, programmes and activities, http://ec.europa.eu/culture/library/reports/2014-heritage-mapping_en.pdf

⁽¹⁵⁾ Enabling synergies between European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020 and other research, innovation and competitiveness-related Union programmes — Guidance for policy-makers and implementing bodies, http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/guides/synergy/synergies_en.pdf

21. stresses that local and regional authorities, as the level of government closest to the general population, must take up a front-line role in developing responsibility for protecting the built and natural environment, in encouraging a positive change in mentality and in rallying the public to this cause. Regular monitoring of the conditions of built heritage should be a common practice; authorities should also encourage the spread of the maintenance practices and training of officials and the monument owners;

22. reiterates that, at all levels, SME-related policy must take account of and work with different business models so as to maximise job creation and sustainable economic growth (such as the cultural and creative industries) ⁽¹⁶⁾;

23. in all areas of cultural heritage, recommends encouraging the involvement of private capital, which requires both introducing tax incentives and shaping responsible public opinion on preserving tangible and intangible heritage; points out that the private sector often plays an important role in cultural promotion through donations or support in the context of corporate social responsibility; local and regional authorities can contribute to the creation of a conducive environment for the best use of this support ⁽¹⁷⁾;

Cultural tourism

24. firmly believes that cultural heritage is a powerful driver of local and regional development for the whole of the population, and creates significant material assets thanks to the promotion of sustainable, responsible, high-quality cultural tourism, the development of which is based on the tangible and intangible heritage of local and regional communities. In the European Committee of the Regions' view, it is now vitally important to create synergies between sustainable tourism strategies and local and regional cultural and creative industries, so as to support economic growth and job creation and facilitate access to culture;

25. points out, however, the importance of striking an appropriate balance between expansion in the cultural tourism sector and protection of cultural heritage;

26. with regarding to exploiting the multifunctional potential of cultural heritage, would draw attention to the cultural routes which run both within countries and across borders and, with the involvement of the public and all relevant stakeholders, make an appreciable contribution to spreading local and regional cultural values, as well as helping in complex ways to support employment, job creation and business operations (for example the manufacture and transport of local products, accommodation and restaurants). The routes are organised on a thematic basis ⁽¹⁸⁾ — providing a common link — and often go through less well-known destinations, municipalities and villages, thus boosting the diversity of tourism options and the visibility of cultural heritage (architectural, landscape, culinary and intangible) in rural areas. Cultural routes (walkways, cycleways etc.) also have an important contribution to make in making improvements to population health;

27. notes that, in connection with cultural tourism related to gastronomy, local specialities are considered as a significant element of culture, attracting tourists who are drawn by local and traditional agricultural and food products. The Committee stresses that sustainable food production and measures to protect the diversity of local and regional culinary heritage help to create sustainable new jobs, which could play a key role in local and regional growth and cohesion;

⁽¹⁶⁾ CdR 151/2011 fin.

⁽¹⁷⁾ CdR 401/2011 fin.

⁽¹⁸⁾ One example is 'Sisi's road' (going through Austria, Germany, Hungary and Italy), which links castles, country houses, parks and cafés with links to Elisabeth, Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary.

28. highlights the significant added value provided by European territorial cooperation programmes in cross-border efforts to preserve and support cultural heritage: by eliminating borders, they raise the profile of Europe and its regions, cities, towns and municipalities through local and regional cooperation; in terms of cultural tourism, they promote the sale of local products; and with regard to creative industries, they make it possible to exchange skills and knowledge, strengthen the regional economy and open up new outlets. They help to prevent the loss of traditional skills and crafts in the face of demographic challenges⁽¹⁹⁾. The Committee considers it important for macro-regional development strategies also to contribute to social, economic and territorial cohesion, as part of cross-border cooperation, by turning the values of European cultural heritage into a tourism product and by implementing innovative and creative solutions;

Cultural heritage in the information society

29. recognises that one of the challenges for the Digital Agenda for Europe is to digitise Europe's cultural heritage and historic monuments, make them accessible online and preserve them for future generations. There has already been some progress in this regard⁽²⁰⁾. In rethinking the general approach to and role of cultural heritage, we need to focus on reaching a wide audience — and also a new one — by reaping the benefits of technology and making use of new communication tools. This will promote the creation of communities, the exchange and development of knowledge, cultural activities, learning and research. In the Committee's view, digitisation and new technologies will, at the same time, open up innovative possibilities for improving competitiveness; there will be mutual reinforcement between creative and innovative industries and the digitised cultural material available to them;

30. stresses that museums, libraries and archives have an important role to play, as regards cultural heritage, in strengthening cohesion in communities. In the 21st century information society, it is worth reflecting on the role and future of local libraries — which, in many Member States, are funded and run by local authorities — with regard to the accessibility and dissemination of knowledge about cultural heritage. When planning the content of new services and new digital media, it is important to look not only at economic criteria, but also at social and cultural needs⁽²¹⁾. Conferences, training courses and study visits undertaken in connection with town twinning schemes could contribute to the exchange of experiences in seeking modern solutions and good practice;

31. considers the EU's projects to have a vital role in promoting digitisation, and highlights the importance of the Europeana cultural platform, which brings together online content from European libraries, museums and archives with the aim of giving everyone online access to Europe's cultural and scientific heritage. The Committee acknowledges that issues relating to copyright and clarification of online rights continue to present a challenge, and it is in favour of establishing a legal framework for digitisation;

32. recognises that film heritage — cinematographic works as a source of information about the history of European society — is an integral part of Europe's cultural heritage, and would therefore like to see better use being made of its industrial and cultural potential. There are still obstacles to be overcome with regard to the digitisation and online publication of films⁽²²⁾; moreover, cinemas play an important role in representing the unique culture and civilisation of every people. Given that the digital revolution and the financial burden could lead to lasting changes for local and regional industry, the CoR would once again call for joint efforts and cooperation to prevent the disappearance of small cinemas⁽²³⁾, and would encourage local and regional authorities to make use of EU funds intended for the modernisation of neighbourhood cinemas;

⁽¹⁹⁾ One example is the 'Academy of Crafts' (Hungary-Slovenia); this project was launched in response to the vulnerable position of the craft trades, with the number of people following such training programmes falling and some industrial and craft schools closing down. The project has reversed this trend, created new opportunities for young people, and helped to preserve cultural heritage, with the involvement of around 1 000 entrepreneurs.

⁽²⁰⁾ *Survey Report on Digitisation in European Cultural Heritage Institutions 2014* — ENUMERATE Thematic Network (January 2014).

⁽²¹⁾ CdR 104/2010 fin.

⁽²²⁾ Fourth report on the implementation of the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on film heritage and the competitiveness of related industrial activities (Commission — progress report 2012-2013), 1 October 2014.

⁽²³⁾ CdR 293/2010 fin.

33. underlines the importance of acquiring digital skills from an early age, within the education system, thus empowering the young generation to fully benefit from the new forms of access to culture and better prepare for future jobs, particularly helping them and large parts of society to deal with the consequences of the digital shift⁽²⁴⁾;

Social integration of cultural heritage

34. welcomes the communication's recognition of the results of the EU's programmes and initiatives to raise public awareness of the social value of cultural heritage and to promote intercultural dialogue. The Committee acknowledges that the European Heritage Label and European Capitals of Culture are initiatives that celebrate the wealth, diversity and common aspects of European cultures⁽²⁵⁾, and underlines the need for applicant cities to develop a specific cultural programme using local and regional resources and to give it a strong European dimension, with a long-term positive impact on the cultural sector and the host city⁽²⁶⁾. It is worth noting that the social perception of Europe's cultural heritage as a valuable factor in development should make it possible to draw up standardised European indicators for measuring the impact of this sector on the local and regional economy and on creating and maintaining jobs;

35. considers that designating a European Year of Cultural Heritage, as proposed by the Council of the European Union⁽²⁷⁾, would help to bring knowledge of cultural heritage to a wider audience;

36. recognises the importance of the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage/Europa Nostra Awards, which were instituted to celebrate excellence in efforts to protect Europe's heritage and to disseminate outstanding technical achievements, and which motivate active members of the public, civil society, local and regional authorities, private foundations and businesses to rescue historic monuments and sites. The new 'Creative Europe' programme also contributes to this goal, focusing particularly on the cultural and creative sectors aiming to operate beyond national borders⁽²⁸⁾;

37. believes that the sanctioning of vandalism of monuments, the environment and its artistic components and archaeological sites needs to be further strengthened;

38. agrees with the view that cultural heritage-related research contributes to the conservation, development and promotion of cultural heritage. The Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7), Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs) and Horizon 2020 can safeguard the dynamism and long-term future of Europe's cultural heritage by promoting research and innovation activities that aim to combat climate change and natural threats and disasters. The Committee welcomes the coming launch of the Research and Innovation policy framework and agenda for cultural heritage, and calls in this connection for a cooperation mechanism to be set up in partnership with local and regional authorities;

39. stresses the need to make cultural assets and services accessible to all, by reducing inequalities of opportunity between rich and poor, urban and rural, young and old, and disabled people. Measures to reduce inequalities can only bear fruit if they are implemented with the support and involvement of the people concerned and if they broaden access to skills. Equality of opportunity is an essential prerequisite for cultural democracy;

40. considers it important for the younger generation to get to know their own tangible and intangible heritage, understand the importance of protecting it, and help to promote cultural assets (for example as part of the European Heritage Days). In the Committee's view, this knowledge can be used to establish partnerships for the sustainable exploitation of cultural heritage and informed use of the environment. It recommends that, as part of European Heritage Days, the theme for the week should be chosen to form a network between local authorities' cultural activities;

⁽²⁴⁾ CdR 2391/2012 fin.

⁽²⁵⁾ CdR 191/2011 fin.

⁽²⁶⁾ CDR 2077/2012 fin.

⁽²⁷⁾ Council conclusions on participatory governance of cultural heritage (2014/C 463/01)
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2014:463:TOC>

⁽²⁸⁾ CdR 401/2011 fin.

41. sees voluntary work as a promising form of local public participation and public relations development. It plays a key role in people's acquisition of knowledge and development of an interest in culture, and helps to prevent the marginalisation of vulnerable groups in society;

Cooperation and the participatory approach

42. considers it important, in order to consolidate the longevity, development and visibility of our cultural heritage, for the intrinsic values of the chain of cultural heritage to be protected and exploited sustainably, and for local and regional authorities and institutions responsible for education, culture and cultural heritage to cooperate and develop their activities — preferably systematically — as this could prove useful in providing the public with information they can understand. Cooperation is synonymous with building trust, establishing contact between peoples, and ensuring that we find shared solutions to shared challenges;

43. underlines the key role played by cross-border town twinning schemes in promoting a mutual, interactive and experience-based understanding of local and regional cultural heritage and of its diversity, thanks to the active involvement of the public. In this regard, the Committee would highlight the added value, at EU level, provided by the 'Europe for Citizens' programme in setting up town twinning programmes and networks of towns; it uses remembrance projects with a European dimension to encourage tolerance and a better understanding of the European Union's history and diversity, and to create a connection between Europe and the public. The CoR also welcomes the fact that this programme is being continued in the EU's new financial framework⁽²⁹⁾;

44. recommends rewarding the best cultural heritage protection practices that emerge from partnerships and cooperation between local authorities, which will also help to strengthen the identity of the European Union;

45. considers it important for thematic cultural heritage cooperation schemes to be set up and implemented in urban and rural municipalities, and for all stakeholders to be encouraged to take an active part in the decision-making process, so as to promote effective participatory governance. The Committee stresses the value and importance of multilevel governance⁽³⁰⁾, which facilitates inter alia the spread of best practice in cultural heritage policy, the development of participatory democracy, mutual learning, the emergence of new forms of partnership and dialogue, and the effectiveness and consistency of sectoral policies in relation to cultural heritage;

46. notes that re-evaluating the importance of culture and cultural heritage is a lengthy process involving all of society's stakeholders. In the CoR's view, this change of attitude can only be achieved if it can be ensured that an even larger proportion of the population feels involved, for example by reducing social inequalities, developing local communities, increasing opportunities for participation in society, creating an openness to new ideas and developing the necessary skills for devising, getting to know and assessing competences with regard to innovation and cultural values. We have a shared responsibility to safeguard, with the involvement of all stakeholders, the acquisition of competitive knowledge and culture, which are so vital for dealing with the challenges facing the EU. In this respect, the CoR welcomes and supports paragraph 28 of the conclusions of the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council of 25 November 2014, which calls for consideration to be given to a European Year of Cultural Heritage. This would contribute to the attainment of shared goals in the pan-European context;

47. underlines the important role that culture can play in foreign affairs in overcoming differences and recognising common and shared values between peoples. The CoR therefore requests that greater visibility be given to high level cultural relations and in this respect takes note of recent efforts to include cultural diplomacy in the European Union's external relations, in particular through the preparatory action on Culture in EU External Relations;

48. also stresses the need for closer cooperation in combating the illicit trade in cultural goods and objects. It therefore urges the Member States to ratify the 1970 UNESCO Convention and the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention, and to ensure that it is enforced in practice by making appropriate changes to national laws and through tighter police and customs controls at EU borders.

Brussels, 16 April 2015

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions
Markku MARKKULA

⁽²⁹⁾ Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014 establishing the 'Europe for Citizens' programme for the period 2014-2020.

⁽³⁰⁾ Charter for Multilevel Governance in Europe.