

Brussels, 30 November 2020

Ms Ylva JOHANSSON  
Commissioner for Home Affairs  
European Commission  
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Dear Commissioner Johansson,

We would like to share with you our concern regarding the issue of trafficking of cultural goods and encourage you to adopt an EU Action plan that tackles this serious topic in a comprehensive manner.

The EU Commission acknowledged in 2016 that evidences show that there is a link between trafficking of cultural goods and terrorism financing in its 2016 Action plan on terrorism financing. This echoes Several United Nations Security Council resolutions, in particular UNSCR 2199, 2253, 2347 and 2462. We are aware of the existing legislative framework for the protection of cultural heritage developed by the EU Commission during the last years . However, we also note that the EU Security Union Strategy of July 2020 indicates that trafficking of cultural goods has become "one of the most lucrative criminal activities, a source of funding for terrorists as well as organised crime and it is on the rise". According to Interpol and Europol reports, there has been an increase of seizures in looted cultural goods, and European organized networks are suspected to be involved in the trafficking of cultural goods from conflict zones on a wide scale.

The damage is not limited to the use of trafficking as a source of terrorism, but also to the impact it has on the preservation of archaeological sites and global heritage, now under risk as they are seen as a source of funding for actors in conflict zones. European museums and public organisations have now well established protocols to guarantee provenance, but the situation needs to be improved for the online and offline traceability of cultural goods in the internal market. In particular, digital platforms and online markets are of particular concern given their low capacity to enforce traceability. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, as well as Skype and WhatsApp have allegedly been used to trade antiquities. The offline market would also benefit from closer attention. For example, a study by the ILLICID project, funded by the German Federal Ministry of Research, concluded that only about two percent of the antiquities traded in Germany from the eastern Mediterranean have a legal origin. In view of the above, it appears that there is a need to improve the existing compliance mechanisms and to close gaps in terms of capacity building.

Much more could be done in relation to third countries. They certainly need European support to combat illicit trade in cultural goods, which could entail a stronger focus in capacity building, increasing international police cooperation, and greater assistance in the protection of their cultural heritage.

The European Parliament has called on the Commission to address the current shortcomings allowing for the destruction of our global heritage for the purposes of terrorism financing . It is our opinion that the solution of the interlinked issues described above could be advanced through the adoption by the Commission of a comprehensive Action Plan in order to counter the trafficking of cultural goods, with a strong focus on traceability and capacity building.

We would like to thank you in advance for any information regarding any action the Commission intends to take in this regard and your assessment of the possibility to launch said Action Plan.

Sincerely yours,

Domènec Ruiz Devesa, Member of the European Parliament, SD

Ibán García del Blanco, Member of the European Parliament, SD

Marco Ros Sempere, Member of the European Parliament, SD

CC : Vice president HRVP Josep Borrell

CC: Vice president Margaritis Schinas

CC: Commissioner Mariya Gabriel

CC: Commissioner Thierry Breton