

Cultural heritage: a resource for Europe

The benefits of interaction

Declaration of Bruges

Preamble

With reference to the conference 'Cultural Heritage: a resource for Europe. The benefits of interaction', the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union states the following:

- Cultural heritage is important on a variety of levels and deserves due attention:
 - European cultural heritage is one of the richest and most diverse in the world. Every year millions of people enjoy monuments, cities of art, archaeological sites, museums and collections, archives, traditions and cultural and natural landscapes.
 - Cultural heritage is a major source of both direct and indirect employment. Regard for heritage and finding a new use for it are important, stimulating factors when it comes to developing a region.
 - Cultural heritage plays a significant role in the quality of life of European citizens. Many closely identify with the heritage that surrounds them because it is unique and irreplaceable.
 - Cultural heritage contributes to the development of a common but diverse European identity. It is an important factor in stimulating cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.
- In the European Union cultural heritage is classified under what is described as 'culture', but the term is broader in scope. Cultural heritage does not stand alone but is closely related to a variety of other sectors such as agriculture, spatial planning, media, research, environment and tourism, etc.
- The European Union only plays a facilitating role in culture. While it can further cooperation and support the exchange of competencies and knowledge, its regulating powers are limited. The day-to-day management and preservation of cultural heritage is organized on a national and/or regional level.
- The European Union does have wider decision-making powers in other policy areas. Because of the above-mentioned overlap between cultural heritage and other sectors, European policy can have direct or indirect consequences for heritage.

- The broad cultural heritage field does contribute to the implementation of the policy of the European institutions, but could organize itself so as to better serve its interests and concerns at EU level.

The Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union declares the following:

- If we are to arrive at an optimal management and preservation of the European cultural heritage it is important that we play a proactive role vis-à-vis the developments, challenges and opportunities which present themselves within European policy.
- It would be advisable to prepare a specific, long-term plan which searches for possibilities to ensure that the potential of cultural heritage is better incorporated in the general policy of the European Union.
- Interaction with the European Union policy-making level is central.
- Various elements can form part of a long-term plan. One of the central elements is the examination and elaboration of a proposal to set up a European platform: an umbrella organization representing governments, academics, professionals, subsidized institutions in charge of the collection of heritage elements and the civil society, which can respond to the developments, challenges and opportunities that present themselves within European policy. Experiences and good practices from other sectors can provide inspiration for the plan. Other instruments and methods, such as European impact assessments, can also make a contribution here.
- We are committed to taking a number steps to develop such a plan in 2011, paying specific attention to the possibilities for setting up a European platform. An international study group will be formed for the purpose.
- All parties concerned (European Parliament, European Union member states, European Commission, Council of Europe, cultural heritage sector, etc.) are invited to contribute. The following presidencies of the European Union can also play an important role in the follow-up of the theme.