

Question for written answer E-001168/2015
to the Commission (Vice-President / High Representative)
Rule 130
Fernando Maura Barandiarán (ALDE)

Subject: VP/HR - Call to action against art looting in Syria and Iraq

Following conflict escalation in Syria, the survival of cultural heritage is at great risk. A call – originating at the V&A Museum in the UK – has come from international museums for a joint force to combat the trade in trafficked art from Syria. IS allows extensive ravaging of archaeological sites in Syria and Iraq, making money by levying a tax on looters operating in the territory discovered during checks. In addition, Bashar Assad's regime is selling antiquities to pay soldiers, and Free Syrian Army fighters have admitted that looting antiquities is a crucial source of income. At the beginning of January Irina Bokova, the Director-General of UNESCO, called for the creation of 'protected cultural zones' around sites in Syria and Iraq. While the humanitarian emergency in Syria is a priority now, police controls must be strengthened in order to prevent art objects and antiquities being smuggled across borders.

1. What initiatives does the High Representative intend to take in order to implement effective security measures at European frontiers?
2. How does the EU intend to foster effective cooperation among countries to initiate joint action against the trading of artefacts of Syrian origin in Europe, since a high concentration of the trade in Middle Eastern art is located in Europe?