

**Question for oral answer O-000031/2015
to the Council**

Rule 128

Silvia Costa

on behalf of the Committee on Culture and Education

Subject: Destruction of cultural sites perpetrated by ISIS/Daesh

The recent attacks perpetrated by ISIS/Da'esh against the Bardo museum in Tunis and the intentional destruction of the Mosul museum in Iraq and of historical sites in Syria have shown that such actions amount to much more than cultural tragedies and could be labelled as acts of cultural cleansing. The aim of the terrorists is to use the destruction of civil and religious buildings and of archaeological sites that belong to the common heritage of humanity as a strategy to destabilise populations and destroy their identity. Also, the lootings of archaeological sites and the illicit trafficking of cultural artefacts are used as an 'instrument of war' to finance terrorist activities.

According to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which was signed 10 years ago, this common heritage of humanity should be 'cherished and preserved for the benefit of all'. Currently, numerous Syrian archaeologists are attempting to list, save and hide, in peril of their lives, cultural goods that are threatened with destruction.

Will the Council take the necessary steps, in cooperation with the UN, the ICOM International Observatory on Illicit Traffic in Cultural Goods, Europol and Interpol – in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2199 of 12 February 2015, which condemns the destruction of cultural heritage in Iraq and Syria – to block the trade in the EU Member States of cultural objects illegally removed from either country, as long as war conditions prevail, thereby preventing them from being used as a source of financing for criminal activities?

Does the Council also recognise the need to establish a new form of cooperation between the EU and UNESCO, with the specific aim of protecting cultural heritage in conflict zones? Will the Council envisage cooperating with the European Space Agency (ESA) to use satellites in order to locate cultural sites in the conflict zone and document them? Would the Council take in consideration, in cooperation with the UN, UNESCO and the ICOM International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS), to establish a dedicated unit, for the international protection of cultural heritage threatened with destruction or looting? Does the Council agree that the systematic and deliberate destruction of the common heritage of humanity not only represents a war crime, as stated by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, but also a crime against humanity and should be prosecuted as such?

Tabled: 7.4.2015

Forwarded: 8.4.2015

Deadline for reply: 29.4.2015