



---

## Interparliamentary meeting “European Cultural Heritage”

19-20 November 2018, EP in Brussels

### Panel 2: “Maintaining, conserving and restoring cultural heritage”

---

#### **Statement by Johannes Selle, Member of the German Bundestag, deputy chairman of the Committee on Cultural and Media Affairs**

In Germany, in the context of the Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, we often hear of the “long road to the Year of Cultural Heritage 2018”. This could be taken as a criticism, but in fact, as I understand it, this is intended to say: “good things take time”. It is true that the term “cultural heritage” has only taken on a specific meaning in recent years, which has led to the decision by the Council of Ministers and the European Commission to highlight this topic with a full thematic year focussing on cultural heritage, promoting actors and projects, and featuring a significant number of events and conferences. And while on the one hand we can talk about the “long road to the Year of Cultural Heritage 2018”, on the other, it is my impression that many citizens have little awareness of cultural heritage, and may even be surprised by the wide variety of events on offer in 2018.

For the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, the Commission defined cultural heritage as consisting of cultural and creative resources of a tangible or intangible nature with a value for society that has been publicly recognised in order to preserve it for future generations. It includes natural, built and archaeological sites, museums, monuments, artworks, historic cities, literary, musical, audio-visual and digital works, along with the knowledge, practices and traditions, of European citizens, including their crafts and languages. Not all products of art, creativity, history and cultural expression can be considered cultural heritage. Instead, cultural heritage is a selection of those products, recognised as being of sufficient worth to pass on to future generations. Every country has its own framework for designating cultural heritage, but the first step shared by all is the identification of its value for society and the public recognition of this status. This can be done in different ways, at national, regional or local levels, for example through inclusion in an official list or national collection.

When we consider this broad understanding of cultural heritage, the new dimension broached by the EU becomes clear. Key elements that define cultural heritage have long been introduced at national, European and international level, while regulations, terms and instruments to record, protect, maintain and promote this heritage and make it accessible are long established. The terms cultural property, monument and world heritage (of humanity) deserve particular mention in this regard. Institutions such as the Council of Europe, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) determined the cultural identity of regions and nations based on the existence of particular objects, groups, collections, buildings, spaces, landscapes and associated customs, and recognised the significance of these long before the European Union

did. There are however differences in the public perception of the prominence of the various activities and profile-raising classifications.

The best-known, as far as I can tell, is the list of world heritage sites, kept by UNESCO since 1978. Germany currently has 44 such sites, located across the entire country. There is a strong awareness of these, they are a source of pride, they are taken care of and their preservation is promoted. The UNESCO activities in this context attract media interest noting among other things their economic benefits, including tourism. Between 2009 and 2014, a special support programme from the German federal government provided a total of 220m euros of federal funds to the German UNESCO world heritage sites for investment and conceptual measures aiming to preserve, restore or develop the sites. This included the restoration of world-class palaces, castles, individual buildings, industrial monuments and nature parks, along with urban development measures in the vicinity of the sites and the creation of tourist management systems. Another aim of the investment programme was to intensify an exchange of specialist knowledge between world heritage sites.

The **Council of Europe**, which currently has 47 member states and was founded 1949, has designated 33 cultural routes since 1987. Similar to the UNESCO process, application and recognition is necessary here. After all, 21 of these routes run at least in part through Germany, and thus through the heart of Europe, so to speak. In this context I must also mention the annual “Open Door Days” that take place in September each year. In Germany, this special day marked its 20th anniversary this year. Initiatives by the Council of Europe and the European Commission (representing the EU) have been joined together in this way since 1999.

The principle of the **EU’s Heritage Label**, introduced in 2013 and thus a relatively young category, is to award sites that “celebrate and symbolise European integration, ideals and history”. An application must also be submitted here. The selection is based purely on the symbolic value for Europe, and not as a result of beauty or architectural quality. Furthermore, the educational aspect, especially for young people, plays a significant role. The financial outlay, to be funded by the EU’s cultural programme, is to be limited to managing and marketing the label, and supporting the network. There are no plans as yet to contribute financially towards the restoration of European sites bearing the heritage label. The label is intended to complement existing cultural heritage initiatives, such as the UNESCO World Heritage List, the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and the Cultural Routes Initiative of the Council of Europe. Currently there are three sites in Germany that have been awarded the EU’s heritage label.

In contrast, **Natura 2000** is a network of over 27,000 protected areas, believe it or not, that reflect the diverse natural heritage of the EU. Last but not least, the **Europeana** collections established from the late 1990s onwards are also worth mentioning. These are a virtual library that aims to bring Europe’s scientific and cultural heritage from pre- and early historical times right up until the present day to a broad public, in the form of image, text, sound and video files. The first version of Europeana appeared online ten years ago.

At national level, it is extremely important for Germany that the Federation itself has a rich cultural heritage that it upholds, restores and makes available through its institutions. However, the Federation also demonstrates its commitment to cultural heritage in Germany in general through institutional support, special programmes and project funding, even though it is currently not obliged to by any relevant provisions in the Basic Law of the Federal Republic, Germany’s constitution. This is generally the responsibility of the federal states (*Länder*) in Germany, with this applying especially to the preservation of historic monuments. This aspect traditionally plays a major role in Germany, with the relevant legal foundation laid out across the various levels

of government, and appropriate administrations in place. Civil society also displays its commitment to this area in the form of the *Deutsche Stiftung Denkmalschutz* (the German Foundation for Monument Protection), foundations at *Länder* level, along with citizens actively involved in clubs, associations and initiatives. I believe this last area to be deserving of particular praise at this point.

The European Union initially undertook efforts to protect cultural property (starting in 1970) and has gone on to additionally “discover” cultural heritage as the Union has deepened and developed. The designation of a European Architectural Heritage Year in 1975 and European Capitals of Culture from 1985 were accompanied by an awareness of national and regional cultural characteristics, which led to the formation of a broader definition of European cultural heritage at the highest level. Both the European Parliament’s Committee on Culture and Education, to which I am most grateful for the invitation to this meeting, and the German Bundestag’s Committee on Cultural and Media Affairs, of which I am deputy chairman, have followed this development closely, organising relevant national and European activities, discussing items and receiving reports. In particular, I wish to mention in this context the European Parliament Resolution of 8 September 2015 “towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe” (2014/2149 INI), as I view the considerations, conclusions and calls for action contained therein to be more topical than ever before in light of the topic of today’s panel, in fact they are virtually timeless.

It is important for me to point out that the development I have outlined above has brought about a host of important legal foundations for the recording, protection, preservation, maintenance and ongoing development of cultural heritage. Fully in keeping with the principle of subsidiarity, actors are called upon and required here from government, institutions of the church, and civil society.

There is much that is unregulated, however, requiring the involvement of owners, institutions, clubs and associations. In the context of the Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, significant conferences were held up in the run-up and during the year itself, at which the topic of our panel: “Maintaining, conserving and restoring cultural heritage” played a central role. Relevant documents include the paper by the German Culture Council (December 2017), the Resolution by the 78th General Assembly of the German Commission for UNESCO at their meeting on 8 June 2018 in Bamberg, the paper by the German Cultural Heritage Committee of 21 June 2018 and the Berlin Call to Action of 28 June 2018, initiated by Europa Nostra as the voice of cultural heritage in Europe, the German Cultural Heritage Committee (DNK) in its role as national coordinator for the European Year of Cultural Heritage in Germany, and the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (SPK). A research alliance also issued a statement.

All of these papers share the idea that the Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 is not to be viewed as a singular event, focussing instead on its impact and ensuring that the findings, suggestions and wishes are considered and picked up where appropriate, in order to ensure that the topic endures. A host of specific demands have been gathered with a future-oriented perspective. While we don’t have the time to go into these demands in detail, it is my impression that we, as (some of) the policymakers, can safely say that we’re certainly not standing by and doing nothing. We are aware that specialist and technical criteria are necessary, areas of responsibility are to be arranged, staffing and material resources including financing are important, and research and training in these areas also plays a key role. Standardisation bodies (EN and DIN) will also be central to the process, and are currently reviewing several significant standardisation principles (DIN EN 15898) with a focus on cultural heritage. In addition to this, several committees and bodies at both the EP and the

German Bundestag are concerned with the subject, as cultural heritage has been established as a cross-cutting issue, thanks among other things to the activities of the European Union.

At a national level in Germany, a solid initial basis to secure the maintenance, conservation and restoration of cultural heritage can be found in the coalition agreement of the parties in the current federal government, the funding programmes from the ministries involved, including the administration and authorities, and the concepts and measures of foundations and industry associations. Nevertheless, or perhaps precisely because of this, we all need to continue to stay abreast of these topics, to exercise scrutiny, to continue to monitor evaluation of the impact of “sharing heritage” and to maintain contact to stakeholders and civil society in this respect.

Looking towards the elections to the European Parliament in 2019 and the formation of a new Commission, it is very important to me that this common thread that has been picked up on this topic at European level is not lost. By this, I do not just mean declaring 2018 a year of celebrating cultural heritage, the annual designation of two Capitals of Culture, and the organisation of numerous prizes and competitions relating to the topic, but instead the promotion of culture, including cultural heritage and the protection of cultural property in a stricter sense within the EU programmes, the continuation and funding of which will soon be up for discussion. I am also keen to highlight two more aspects: firstly, the Commission has organised and awarded no less than five prizes in individual areas to celebrate “Sharing Heritage”. Secondly, the catalogue of ten European initiatives including the four principles looking at European cultural heritage – a catalogue that demonstrates that the Commission has taken in my view the significant and correct step to meet the requirements of the European Parliament Resolution of 8 September 2015 “towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe” (2014/2149 INI). Section 5.1 of the current communication from the Commission: “A New European Agenda for Culture” {SWD(2018) 167 final} of 22 May 2018 contains key approaches to the future protection and promotion of cultural heritage.

In light of this, I look forward to the contributions from the other participants and delegations, and to the findings from this meeting.

**Berlin/Brussels, November 2018**