

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2446/03

by Alonso Puerta (GUE/NGL) and Alejandro Cercas (PSE)
to the Commission

Subject: Protection of the European cultural heritage

Both Article 151 of the EC Treaty and the draft European Constitution just approved by the Convention stress the major importance of the European cultural heritage and the need to maintain and preserve it in full for future generations.

In the existing fifteen Member States alone, there are 188 sites included the UNESCO World Heritage List.

This extensive heritage is, however, under continual threat from planning developments and speculation in the construction sector affecting historic sites. This poses severe risks to protected natural areas, despite the importance of rigorous protection of our unique heritage, as one of the symbols of Europe's identity.

A recent example is the appeal forwarded to the Spanish authorities by several thousand citizens - including personalities from European social and cultural milieux - regarding the threat posed to the San Lorenzo del Escorial monastery (Spain), which has been on the UNESCO World Heritage list since 1984, by the disturbing rate of urban development affecting its crucial natural surroundings.

Is the Commission aware of this serious problem? If so, will it ask the Madrid regional government and the Spanish government to provide information as a matter of urgency?

Will the Commission act to give real teeth to the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, which has been signed by all the EU Member States?