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Subject:	Council Conclusions on EU Approach to Cultural Heritage in conflicts and crises

Delegations will find in the Annex the Council Conclusions on EU Approach to Cultural Heritage in conflicts and crises, as approved by the Council at its meeting held on 21 June 2021.

**COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON
EU APPROACH TO CULTURAL HERITAGE IN CONFLICTS AND CRISES**

1. The Council recalls its conclusions of 8 April 2019 on a European Union (EU) strategic approach to international cultural relations and reaffirms its support to the integration of international cultural relations in the EU's Foreign and Security Policy. In that respect, the Council welcomes the EU Concept on cultural heritage in conflicts and crises, which provides an important contribution to enhancing the EU's strategic approach to peace, security and development.
2. The Council recognises the role of cultural heritage as an important vehicle for peace, democracy and sustainable development by fostering tolerance, mutual understanding, reconciliation, inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue, mitigating social tensions and preventing renewed escalation into violent conflict. At the same time, the Council also recognises that cultural heritage can be instrumentalised as a trigger for and a target in conflicts and crises and can be subject to disinformation or information manipulation.

The Council emphasises the importance of awareness and protection of cultural heritage as part of a conflict sensitive approach, throughout all phases of conflicts and crises. Protecting and safeguarding cultural heritage, as well as promoting respect for cultural diversity, are fundamental to preventing violent extremism, to fighting against disinformation and to generating positive dialogue and inclusion. The Council also recalls its conclusions of 7 December 2020 on EU Peace Mediation and reaffirms the role of cultural heritage as an entry point for mediation.

3. The Council recognises that engaging on cultural heritage, including its protection and preservation, in the aftermath of a conflict or a crisis helps protect identities for individuals and communities, serving as a basis for sustainable recovery and lasting peace, and thus contributing to the overall resilience of societies. In that respect, the Council insists on the importance of the economic, social and environmental aspects related to cultural heritage and encourages an approach and concrete actions aimed at enhancing inclusive and sustainable development, including in terms of employment opportunities for local communities. The Council also highlights the importance of sustainable cultural tourism for supporting economic livelihoods and creating employment opportunities.
4. The Council stresses the importance of local ownership and the need to place local communities' needs and participation at the centre of the efforts, when supporting partner countries in ensuring the protection of cultural heritage. In that respect, the Council stresses the importance of education and of digitalisation when engaging in capacity building in the field, including the need to enhance awareness about existing databases relating to cultural heritage at risk. It encourages the use of advanced digital tools and technologies to record, document and preserve cultural heritage.
5. The Council affirms the importance of engaging on intangible heritage as a way to build common understanding, notably by enhancing inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue and by ensuring the transmission of traditions and knowledge. The Council recalls the importance of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and stresses the complementarity and interlinkages that can exist between intangible and tangible heritage. In addition, the Council recognises the need to support measures which aim to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change on natural and cultural heritage.
6. The Council highlights the importance of the EU's value-based approach when engaging in the protection of cultural heritage in conflicts and crises. It also emphasises the need to adopt a conflict-sensitive approach and respect the "do-no harm" principle. It welcomes the positive contribution that the EU's concept can make to the Responsibility to Protect by supporting efforts aiming to protect and halt the destruction of cultural heritage.

7. The Council reiterates the EU's commitment to the full implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and notes the contribution of the EU's concept on cultural heritage to the implementation of the EU policy framework on WPS agenda, including the EU Strategic Approach to WPS and the EU Action Plan on WPS. In this context, the Council further highlights the importance of an inclusive, equal and non-discriminatory approach when engaging on cultural heritage in conflicts and crises, especially in aspects related to gender, youth, persons belonging to minorities, religious belief and communities, and indigenous peoples.

8. The Council stresses the EU's commitment to upholding and strengthening the rules-based international order to protect and safeguard cultural heritage, with the United Nations (UN) at its core, and ensuring effective multilateralism based on the respect for international law norms and principles, international humanitarian law, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Council also recognises the Human Rights aspect of this issue, as per the Human Rights Council Resolution of 6 October 2016 on "Cultural rights and the protection of cultural heritage".

The Council also reminds of the importance of strengthening partnerships with relevant international organisations, notably the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Council of Europe (CoE), regional organisations, as well as relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, to protect and safeguard cultural heritage.

9. The Council calls for the protection and safeguard of cultural heritage to be highlighted in relevant strategic and programming documents and mainstreamed into the work of the Council within the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

10. The Council recalls that the EU approach to cultural heritage in conflicts and crises is part of the EU's Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises, in which it forms part of a politically and operationally coherent EU response in the context of the EU's Global Strategy. The Council also underlines the importance of coordination between Member States' respective instruments and initiatives to improve the ability to respond quickly in relation to the protection of cultural heritage and preventing its destruction during and after crises with an objective of stabilisation and peace.

The Council also highlights the importance of integrating the protection of cultural heritage into all the relevant dimensions of the EU toolbox for conflicts and crises, including in Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), as well as other areas of the EU's external action and in appropriate financial instruments, including Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe.

11. The Council also stresses the importance of the contribution that CSDP missions and operations could provide, in full respect of their core mandates, to address security related challenges linked to the preservation and protection of cultural heritage.

In that respect and in line with the Civilian CSDP Compact and the Council Conclusions of 7 December 2020, the Council looks forward to a dedicated mini-concept to explore possibilities to develop civilian CSDP missions' efforts, where appropriate, in this field, such as through possible capacity building programmes or training activities.

12. The Council recalls its conclusions of 16 June 2020 on EU External Action on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism. It stresses that illegal excavation, looting and trafficking of cultural property is linked to serious security threats, as it provides means for financing of organised criminal and terrorist activities. It also has a socio-cultural impact, as it is a political tool to weaken communities and identities. In that respect the Council reaffirms the importance of urgently enhancing the fight against illicit trade in cultural property and the fight against terrorism also on the basis of existing international legal frameworks, such as relevant UN, CoE and other similar legal instruments, where applicable. It calls for further close cooperation and synergies with Justice and Home Affairs actors. It looks forward to the Commission to developing an action plan on trafficking of cultural goods as proposed in its Communication on the EU Strategy to tackle Organised Crime 2021-2025, published on 13 April 2021, and insists on the importance to address both the internal and external dimensions of the subject.

13. The Council invites Member States to enhance collaboration between the relevant Ministries, local and regional authorities, and other relevant stakeholders, including civil society and academic world, as well as relevant international, regional, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations. It stresses the importance, amongst all EU stakeholders, to collect and share best practices on cultural heritage initiatives developed in conflict, crisis and post conflicts settings.

14. The Council invites the European External Action Service (EEAS), together with the Commission and all relevant EU Agencies and bodies to exchange best practices and develop expertise aimed at streamlining cultural heritage and its protection in Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management. The Council also invites the EEAS and the Commission to report to the Political and Security Committee, within one year and on a regular basis on the progress made in the implementation of the measures proposed and of the main elements set out in the Concept.