Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe

2014/2149(INI) - 08/09/2015 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 613 votes to 70 with 19 abstentions, a resolution entitled ‘Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe’.

Members recalled that culture and cultural heritage are shared resources and are common goods and values that cannot be subject to an exclusive use, and their full potential for sustainable human, social and economic development **has yet to be fully recognised** and properly exploited, both at the level of EU strategies and the UN post-2015 development goals.

Parliament considered that **an integrated approach** is necessary if one wishes to achieve cultural dialogue and mutual understanding. In this context, it addressed the following recommendations to the Commission:

- to establish a **common approach** within the Commission through improved cooperation between the different policy areas dealing with cultural heritage, and to report back to Parliament on the results of this closer cooperation;
- to communicate to potential beneficiaries, in a straightforward and accessible way such as through a **single information platform** and exchange of best practices in the EU, concerning the existing European funding lines for cultural heritage;
- to designate, preferably for 2018, **a European Year of Cultural Heritage**, with an adequate budget and to submit the draft programme for the European Year to Parliament no later than 2016;
- to acknowledge, within its **political and transversal approach**, cultural heritage as both movable and immovable, tangible and intangible, and as a non-renewable resource whose authenticity must be preserved.

European funding: in addition to setting up a **single EU portal** dedicated to tangible and intangible cultural heritage, Parliament called on the Commission to:

- support, with **dedicated funding**, studies, research and pilot measures specifically designed to: (i) analyse the impacts of cultural heritage promotion processes; (ii) develop specific indicators and benchmarks in relation to the direct and indirect contribution of that heritage to economic and social development processes, and (iii) directly support cultural and social innovation integrated into local settings in which cultural heritage can drive development and help improve people’s quality of life;
- strengthen the newly established principle of **multifunding**, which allows the complementary use of different European funds within the same large-scale project;
- review the EUR 5 million benchmark in relation to cultural heritage projects submitted in the framework of the small-scale infrastructure action, bringing it to at least the same level as UNESCO projects, i.e. **EUR 10 million**.

Member States are invited to look into possible fiscal incentives in relation to restoration, preservation and conservation work, such as reductions in VAT or other taxes, given that European cultural heritage is also managed by private bodies. The Commission is urged to take stock of best practices in fiscal policies in Europe and recommend the appropriate ones to the Member States.

Stressing the importance of cross-border cultural projects, Members called for measures to be taken to strengthen and expand support for funding through public-private partnership agreements.

Moreover, they stressed the need for new governance models to include a system of quality control in all alternative forms of funding and administration of cultural heritage.

The economic and strategic potential of cultural heritage: the report noted that cultural heritage contributes to innovative jobs, products, services and processes and that it plays a vital role in **several of the Europe 2020 flagship initiatives**, such as the Digital Agenda, the Innovation Union, the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs and the industrial policy for the globalisation era.

Therefore, Members called for **greater recognition of the role of European cultural heritage as a strategic resource** for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth in the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy.

Cultural tourism: this sector, which accounts for 40 % of European tourism, is a key economic sector in terms of potential for growth and employment. It underlined the possibility of focusing more strongly on cultural tourism in developing **macro-regional strategies** designed to make it a more integral part of the strategic framework for European cooperation.

Members recalled the importance of promoting the conservation of cultural heritage assets and **encouraging all forms of sustainable tourism** by shaping sustainable, less invasive and higher value-added forms of cultural and natural tourism,

Members insisted on the need to:

- give cultural heritage its clear place in the Commission's Investment Plan for Europe and to ensure that adequate funds and initiatives are directed to the valorisation of Europe's cultural heritage;
- promote excellence, innovation and competitiveness in the cultural and creative sectors by supporting the work of artists, creators and cultural professionals;
- propose a set of indicators that could be used for monitoring and evaluation of the situation of cultural heritage and that would be uniform for all Member States;
- develop and promote opportunities for mobility and exchange of experiences for those working in the cultural heritage sector, by ensuring that there is genuine professional reciprocity;
- promote in school curricula the inclusion of art, music, theatre and film education as a key to developing knowledge of cultural heritage.

Opportunities and challenges: overall, Members encouraged the creation of **all-round tourist products based on an integrated development/strategy plan** in order to enhance the visibility of the cultural heritage. The resolution also insisted, inter alia, on:

- the need to **improve the level of digitisation**, preservation and online availability of cultural heritage, in particular the European film heritage;
- the importance of developing a true democratic and participative narrative for European heritage, including that of religious and ethnic minorities. Religious heritage constitutes an intangible part of European cultural heritage, regardless of its religious origins;
- the importance of intercultural dialogue both within and outside Europe. The Union should promote such dialogue as an appropriate tool against radicalism of whatever origin;
- supporting cultural activities of migrant communities;
- improving accessibility to cultural heritage sites for people with disabilities;
- the importance of the gastronomic heritage, which must be protected and supported;
- strengthening efforts to fight the stealing, smuggling and illegal trafficking of cultural heritage assets inside and outside the EU;
- the importance of protecting and conserving cultural heritage, not only from the ravages of time but also from hooliganism and despoliation.

Lastly, Parliament encouraged the adoption of **international agreements to prevent illicit trafficking of cultural heritage**. In this regard, the EU, together with the UN and UNESCO, should defend heritage in danger and fight looting and destruction of cultural objects in conflict areas.