Convention on the protection of world cultural and natural heritage: application in the Union's countries

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Christine DE VEYRAC (EPP-ED, F) on the application of the Convention on the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage. The report began by pointing out that the EU was over-represented on the list of World Heritage Sites (acounting for 30%) and that historic towns and religious buildings were over-represented compared with other categories. While this could be explained partly by the major worlwide influence Europe had had on the development of civilisation, and by its effective heritage-conservation work, it was important to remember that the less developed countries were unintentionally but automatically penalised by the constraints of preparing application files for the World Heritage List. The Member States were accordingly urged to encourage non-European countries to complete the list of their natural and cultural heritage assets and to provide appropriate practical assistance to those countries under UNESCO. The Commission was urged to assist, under existing programmes, developing countries which were facing problems with the recognition, description and conservation of cultural sites. The committee also called on the Member States to use all means available to stamp out the growing illegal trade in archaeological finds plundered from non-European countries. The report put forward the idea of a European heritage classification system which would make it possible to identify cultural, linguistic and natural heritage sites which were of more than mere national interest without aspiring to world status and to accord these a recognisable European label. It called for the natural and architectural urban and rural heritage to be regarded as an indivisible whole, requiring joint protective measures. It also drew attention to Article 3 of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, which stipulated that the impact assessment required for all public and private projects should include an assessment of the visual impact and impact on the landscape. The cultural heritage should therefore be afforded the same respect as other non-renewable resources. The committee approved of the fact that 34% of the total budget for the "Culture 2000" programme had been allocated to the heritage in the broadest sense, including intellectual and non-intellectual heritage, museums, photographic and audiovisual archives and the underwater heritage. Lastly, the report wanted the profession of 'heritage restorer' to be organised at various training levels with the aim of ensuring the quality of heritage restoration work. Training programmes should be set up devoting particular attention to arts and crafts, and practical measures should be taken to preserve and transmit rare professional skills in this field to future generations. Conservation of the cultural heritage was a sector which could provide a sound basis for the promotion of new jobs in the EU.