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#### INFORMATION NOTE

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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Council

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Subject: Defence of cultural heritage in crisis areas: the role of the European Union  
- *Information from the Italian delegation*

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Delegations will find attached an information note from the Italian delegation on the above subject, which has been put on the agenda under 'Any other business' for the next Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting on 20-21 November 2017.

**Defence of cultural heritage in crisis areas:  
the role of the European Union**

Cultural heritage has increasingly become the direct target of deliberate attacks in numerous conflicts around the world. In addition, cultural heritage resources, including intangible ones, are increasingly affected by natural disasters, the result of a variety of underlying factors such as natural and human-made hazards and climate change.

The recent, unprecedented attacks against culture and heritage, together with the increased occurrence of natural disasters cannot leave us indifferent. Besides, culture is a fertile ground for the promotion of peace and international security and a fundamental trait of United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Having this in mind, since 2014, Italy has embarked on a clear and defined path, placing at the centre of its foreign policy the protection of cultural heritage at risk and the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural goods. In this historic phase, we deemed necessary to bring about an international effort to avoid the destruction of tangible and intangible resources belonging to the whole of humanity. The first strong call for action was launched at the meeting of the Ministers of Culture during Expo Milan 2015, with a clear commitment to the protection of the cultural heritage at risk and to the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural goods.

It was at that time that we witnessed the destruction of Palmira by terrorist attacks. Palmira was reduced to ruins and the whole International Community, Italy in particular, moved forward in adopting effective measures to prevent and protect cultural goods in conflicts and post-conflict restoration and to fight against illicit trafficking. Then, the idea of the so-called “Blue Helmets of Culture” was born.

Recently, Italy presented to the United Nations in New York a team composed of 30 civilian experts from the Italian Ministry of Culture and Tourism and 30 experts from the “Cultural Heritage Protection Command” of the “Carabinieri”. It is a task force characterized by extraordinary skills, acquired since 1969, a year before the adoption of the Unesco Convention of Paris, which requires Member States to adopt appropriate measures to prevent the acquisition of illicitly exported goods and foster the recovery of that which was stolen.

Italy strongly believes that the effort towards the protection of cultural heritage should not only be a shared responsibility but a global responsibility in terms of peace-keeping and international security. The unanimously approved United Nations Security Council Resolution 2347, presented by Italy and France, is an example of the degree of awareness that the idea of cultural protection has achieved in global policies and it recognizes that the protection of cultural heritage is imperative for security.

A few days after the adoption of Res. 2347, on March 30th and 31st, the very first G7 Ministerial meeting of Culture, in Florence, witnessed the unanimous approval of a G7 Declaration of commitment for the protection of Cultural Heritage.

Italy firmly believes in the role that the European Union can play in this field, starting with the 2016 joint Communication by Commissioner Tibor Navracsics and High Representative and Vice-President Federica Mogherini “Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations”, which represents the first, well-structured indication of the growing importance of culture for the EU.

We believe that culture should acquire the importance it deserves. In this historical moment, with raising scepticism and populism, we think the EU should respond with additional, significant steps towards more integration. We have already started with the recent launch of a European Union’s civilian mission in Iraq, which includes a cultural expert with the task of assisting Iraq security forces to preserve cultural heritage. We believe that we should continue to work in the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy and introduce a strong cultural element in all EU peace-keeping missions.