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CULT HERIT 13  
RELEX 1531  
CULT 126  
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#### INFORMATION NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Presentation given by a Professor from the Trento University at the RELEX Horizontal Questions (International Cultural Relations) meeting of 28 November 2024

Delegations will find in the annex a presentation given by an external stakeholder (Trento university representative) at a meeting of the WP RELEX-HQ (International Cultural Relations) on 28 November 2024. The views expressed in the presentation are solely those of the third party concerned. This document cannot be regarded as stating an official position of the Council and it does not reflect the views of the Council or of its members.

**BRIDGING CULTURE AND SECURITY:  
THE EU'S ROLE IN COMBATING CULTURAL TRAFFICKING  
IN CONFLICT AND CRISIS ZONES**

**University of Trento,  
Italy**

**Brussels, 28 November 2024**

# A phenomenon on the rise

- The black market in antiquities “constitutes one of the most persistent illegal trades in the world.” (UNESCO)
- A significant portion of antiquities on the global market originates from illicit sources, and “their trade is often associated with other forms of organized crime, such as drug traffic and money laundering.” (European Commission)
- “Ancient artefacts also represent a potential source of wealth for terrorist groups.” (INTERPOL)

# The security-culture nexus

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The identity-bound character of contemporary conflicts, coupled with the existence of illicit war economies and the frequent occurrence in weak or failed states, are the primary factors behind the intensified destruction and trafficking of cultural property in today's warfare.





# The politics of identity

The politics of identity lie at the core of these conflicts. Since identity is deeply tied to culture, and cultural property often embodies identity, it is unsurprising that cultural heritage has become a deliberate target of warfare in recent and current conflicts, from the Balkans to Iraq, from Libya to Afghanistan, from Syria to Mali, and today Ukraine.



## Putting things in the right perspective

- The scale of the market in illicit cultural goods is often overstated.
- The end market for looted antiquities extends beyond the West.
- A significant part of the illicit trade in cultural goods has moved online.
- The link between trafficking and terrorism should not be exaggerated.
- The extensive anti-trafficking legal framework in place is not fully effective.



# Root causes of trafficking and EU contributions

ROOT CAUSES	EU CONTRIBUTION
<b>Armed conflict, crises and instability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical protection, emergency initiatives, preventive actions, safe havens</li> <li>Stability and conflict management through CSDP</li> <li>Implementation of 2021 Concept</li> </ul>
<b>Hardship, poverty and underdevelopment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development and cooperation</li> <li>Job and income generation for local communities</li> <li>Local ownership for effective implementation</li> </ul>
<b>Ignorance and poor ethics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness raising and education campaigns</li> <li>Ensure higher political prioritization</li> <li>Training and technical assistance</li> </ul>
<b>Inadequate policies and legal frameworks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legislation development</li> <li>Cross-border inter-agency cooperation</li> <li>Harmonizing EU national laws</li> <li>Ratification and effective national implementation of relevant legislation</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of competences and expertise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specialized training for law enforcement, customs, museums</li> <li>Forster inter-agency cooperation</li> <li>Support the creation of a specialised unit at EU level</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of infrastructure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capacity-building and technical assistance</li> <li>Establish national databases of stolen and missing cultural goods and interlinking with INTERPOL database.</li> </ul>
<b>Valorization and preservation of national heritage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exhibitions, joint-activities, festivals</li> <li>3D</li> </ul>

# Root causes of trafficking and EU contributions

Root causes	EU contribution
Armed conflict, crises and instability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical protection, emergency initiatives and preventive actions, storage and safe havens.</li> <li>Countering cultural destruction and trafficking thorough civilian CSDP missions</li> <li>Cultural heritage mandates for military CSDP operations</li> <li>Implementation of 2021 Concept</li> </ul>
Hardship, poverty and underdevelopment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development &amp; cooperation, capacity-building and technical assistance</li> <li>Job and income opportunities for local communities</li> <li>Local ownership and economic development for effective planning and implementation</li> <li>Public-private partnerships (PPP)</li> </ul>
Ignorance and poor ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness raising and education campaigns</li> <li>Training and technical assistance</li> <li>Ensure higher political prioritization</li> </ul>



# Conclusion

- Significant progress has been made, but more remains to be done.
- Institutionalize and consolidate recent advancements.
- Strengthen institutional frameworks with adequate funding and skilled personnel.
- Mainstream cultural heritage in EU external action.
- Foster an integrated EU approach.

