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## List of acronyms and abbreviations

<b>ACP</b>	African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States
<b>ALIPH</b>	International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas
<b>AML/CFT</b>	Anti-Money Laundering / Countering the Financing of Terrorism
<b>CIVCOM</b>	Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management
<b>CIVOPSHQ</b>	Civilian Operations Headquarters
<b>CLASI</b>	Latin American Committee on Internal Security
<b>CSDP</b>	Common Security and Defence Policy
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>DG EAC</b>	Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
<b>DG ECHO</b>	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
<b>EEAS</b>	European External Action Service
<b>EMPACT</b>	European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats
<b>ENI</b>	European Neighbourhood Instrument
<b>ESDC</b>	European Security and Defence College
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUAM</b>	European Union Advisory Mission
<b>EUBAM</b>	European Union Border Assistance Mission
<b>EUDEL</b>	European Union Delegation
<b>EULEX</b>	European Union Rule of Law Mission (in Kosovo <sup>1</sup> )
<b>EUMA</b>	European Union Mission in Armenia
<b>EUMM</b>	European Union Monitoring Mission
<b>EUNIC</b>	European Union National Institutes for Culture
<b>EUROPOL</b>	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation
<b>EUROJUST</b>	European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation
<b>EUTF</b>	European Union Emergency Trust Fund
<b>FPI</b>	Foreign Policy Instrument
<b>FRONTEX</b>	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
<b>ICCROM</b>	International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property
<b>ICOM</b>	International Council of Museums
<b>IBM</b>	Integrated Border Management
<b>INTERPOL</b>	International Criminal Police Organization
<b>ISF</b>	Internal Security Fund

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<sup>1</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

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<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa
<b>MIP</b>	Mission Implementation Plan
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>NDICI</b>	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe
<b>OPLAN</b>	Operations Plan
<b>PRISM</b>	Prevention, Research, Investigation and Security in Museums
<b>RDNA</b>	Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment
<b>SATCEN</b>	European Union Satellite Centre
<b>TPC</b>	Tutela Patrimonio Culturale (Italian Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage)
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
<b>UNITAD</b>	United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL
<b>WCO</b>	World Customs Organization

***Executive summary***

*Cultural heritage is increasingly recognised not only as a cultural asset but also its protection as a strategic component of peace, resilience, and human security, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The adoption of the Culture Compass for Europe in 2025 further strengthened the policy framework by reinforcing links between cultural heritage, security, sustainable development and international cultural cooperation in EU policymaking and external relations.*

*This report presents the progress made by the European Union between June 2024 and December 2025 in implementing the Concept on Cultural Heritage in Conflicts and Crises and the related Council Conclusions. During the reporting period, the EU continued to consolidate a more structured and integrated approach, combining diplomatic engagement, crisis management instruments, development cooperation, regulatory measures, and partnerships with international organisations. This reflects a shift from isolated initiatives towards a more coherent model of action, linking cultural heritage protection with security, governance, development and international cooperation, including through partnership agreements where relevant.*

*A major focus of EU action has been the protection of cultural heritage in Ukraine, where Russia's war of aggression has deliberately targeted cultural heritage, causing extensive damage to cultural sites and institutions. The EU has mobilised financial, technical and political support to safeguard heritage assets, to strengthen institutional capacities and prepare for longer-term recovery. Its initiatives include the Team Europe approach for Cultural Heritage in Ukraine that coordinates actions by Member States and EU institutions around protection, conservation and capacity-building. Since 2022, the EU has mobilised over EUR 50 million for the protection of Ukraine's culture and creative sectors, including specific support for heritage protection, digitisation, professional training, and counter-trafficking efforts. In parallel, it has used restrictive measures to prevent the illicit trade of cultural objects removed from Ukraine.*

*The report also highlights the integration of cultural heritage protection into the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Several civilian CSDP missions address cultural heritage as part of their work on rule of law, organised crime, border management, conflict prevention and confidence-building. During the reporting period, missions incorporated cultural heritage considerations into operational planning, training, and cooperation with national authorities. A dedicated cultural heritage focal-point network coordinated by the*

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*Civilian Operations Headquarters has strengthened knowledge-sharing and operational coherence across missions.*

*Efforts to combat the illicit trafficking of cultural property remain a key pillar of EU action. Cultural heritage trafficking continues to be linked to organised crime and, in some contexts, to money laundering and to terrorist financing. The EU Action Plan against trafficking in cultural goods<sup>2</sup> guides EU measures aimed at improving traceability, strengthening law-enforcement cooperation and addressing vulnerabilities in the art market, including those related to online platforms and digital transactions.*

*Beyond security measures, the EU continues to support sustainable protection and recovery of cultural heritage through development cooperation and partnerships with organisations such as UNESCO, the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), the international Council of Museums (ICOM) and other international stakeholders. EU-funded projects across multiple regions contribute to capacity-building, documentation, risk preparedness, restoration and community engagement, recognising that heritage protection can foster social cohesion, identity preservation and economic recovery.*

*Despite these advances, challenges remain, including limited institutional capacities in partner countries, fragmented heritage inventories, gaps in investigative expertise, and political sensitivities surrounding heritage in contested or conflict-affected areas. There is also still insufficient recognition of the deliberate destruction of tangible and intangible cultural heritage as a method of warfare. Continued investment in training, coordination, specialised expertise and partnerships will be necessary to ensure sustainable impact. As global instability persists and new crises emerge, safeguarding cultural heritage remains both a shared responsibility and a strategic investment in peace, resilience and sustainable development.*

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<sup>2</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Action Plan against Trafficking in Cultural Goods ([COM\(2022\) 800 final](#))

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage is a powerful force for peace. It can serve as a unifying element, fostering identities, social cohesion and sustainable economic development. At the same time, it may become a source of division, as disputes over identity, memory and ownership can exacerbate tensions and be deliberately instrumentalised in situations of crisis and conflict. Today, cultural heritage faces unprecedented pressures: ongoing armed conflicts, illicit trafficking of cultural property, climate change, natural disasters, neglect and structural underinvestment threaten both tangible and intangible heritage across regions. In response, the European Union continues to play its role as a global actor in the protection of cultural heritage, recognising its strategic relevance for peace, resilience and human security.

Within the EU institutional framework, this engagement is guided by a growing set of policy and operational instruments. A key milestone was the adoption in 2021 of the Concept on Cultural Heritage in Conflicts and Crises<sup>3</sup>, politically endorsed through Council Conclusions<sup>4</sup>. Together, these documents established the first comprehensive framework for EU action in this field, recognising the protection of cultural heritage as an integral component of the Union's external action, crisis management and peacebuilding efforts. They provide the strategic and operational basis for the initiatives and activities presented in this report and call for regular monitoring and reporting on their implementation; the present report is produced in fulfilment of that mandate.

A significant milestone in this evolving policy framework was the adoption, in November 2025, of the Culture Compass for Europe<sup>5</sup>. As the most comprehensive strategic framework for EU cultural policy to date, the Culture Compass places culture – including cultural heritage – at the heart of EU policymaking. It articulates a long-term vision structured around key priorities: upholding cultural rights and European values; empowering cultural and creative sectors; reinforcing resilience and social cohesion through culture; and strengthening international cultural relations. By providing overarching strategic direction and identifying flagship actions, the Culture Compass enhances coherence across EU instruments and reinforces the link between cultural heritage, security, sustainability and external action.

The present report focuses on actions implemented or operationalised during the period from June 2024 to December 2025. Beyond the measures detailed in the following chapters,

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<sup>3</sup> Concept on Cultural heritage in conflicts and crises. A component for peace and security in European Union's external action ([9962/21](#))

<sup>4</sup> Council Conclusions on EU Approach to Cultural Heritage in conflicts and crises ([9837/21](#)).

<sup>5</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A Culture Compass for Europe ([15410/25](#))

analytical work is ongoing to assess needs, identify further potential partners and explore possible avenues for engagement in other contexts, in line with EU policy frameworks and the principles set out in the 2021 Council Conclusions and the Concept on Cultural Heritage in conflicts and crises.

Looking beyond areas already covered by EU actions in this field, new challenges have emerged. In Gaza, the latest Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment conducted by the World Bank, in cooperation with the European Union and the United Nations, points to extensive damage to cultural and religious sites, historic buildings and community spaces, illustrating the severe impact of hostilities on the social and cultural fabric of the territory<sup>6</sup>. In Sudan, the ongoing conflict has placed museums, archives and archaeological sites at acute risk, with documented cases of looting and destruction further weakening already fragile institutional capacities<sup>7</sup>. In Syria, after years of conflict and prolonged neglect, cultural heritage continues to suffer from structural degradation and renewed illicit excavations in vulnerable archaeological areas<sup>8</sup>. The scale and persistence of destruction in these and other crises underline the urgency of sustained and coherent engagement.

Across theatres ranging from Ukraine to the Middle East, Africa and beyond, EU action seeks to integrate emergency protection, institutional capacity-building and long-term recovery into a coherent approach. In line with established policy frameworks, the EU continues to embed cultural heritage protection within its broader security, development and humanitarian engagement, including through the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the fight against illicit trafficking, sanctions regimes and preparedness mechanisms.

This 2025 Progress Report provides an overview of the measures undertaken and further developed during the reporting period. It reflects the EU's continued effort to move from isolated initiatives towards a more structured and integrated model of action, combining internal and external instruments, regulatory measures, operational engagement and international partnerships. As global instability persists and new crises emerge, safeguarding cultural heritage remains not only a matter of preservation, but a strategic investment in peace, resilience and a more secure future.

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<sup>6</sup> [GAZA AND WEST BANK INTERIM RAPID DAMAGE AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT. FEBRUARY 2025.](#)  
© 2025, the World Bank, the European Union, the United Nations.

<sup>7</sup> James Copnall, "[From prized artworks to bullet shells: how war devastated Sudan's museums](#)", BBC, April 2025.

<sup>8</sup> William Christou, "[Looted from Syria, sold on Facebook: antiquities smuggling surges after fall of Assad](#)", The Guardian, June 2025.

## **2. EU SUPPORT FOR THE PROTECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN UKRAINE**

Since the beginning of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the European Union has remained steadfast in its support for the protection, preservation and restoration of Ukrainian cultural heritage, recognising its importance for identity, resilience and recovery. This commitment continued throughout the reporting period, during which the EU further intensified its comprehensive efforts and adapted its actions to the evolving conditions on the ground. As the war continued, the European Union strengthened its policy, financial and operational support to Ukraine’s cultural sector, while reinforcing cooperation with Ukrainian authorities, Member States and international partners.

On 19 November 2024, the European Commission-led Expert Group publicly presented its recommendations during the event [“Resilience Through Culture: The EU’s Support for the Ukrainian Cultural Sector”](#) in Brussels. The recommendations address key thematic priorities – recognising the value of cultural heritage; risk management and preparedness; documentation and monitoring; and recovery – and are directed to EU institutions, Ukrainian national, regional and local authorities, and civil society organisations<sup>9</sup>.

In December 2024, the Commission launched the ICOM-led PRISM (Prevention, Research, Investigation and Security in Museums) project, a 3-year action worth EUR 822 456, on the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural goods. The project focuses on Ukraine and other six countries (Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia). Each country has their own specific project based on their own specific needs and priorities.

On 1 February 2025, the European Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport Glenn Micallef participated in the first International Conference, “Cooperation for Resilience”, which took place in Uzhorod<sup>10</sup>. The Conference brought

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<sup>9</sup> Culture is central to a people-centred and participatory post-war recovery in Ukraine and must be prioritised from the earliest stages. In the current emergency context, cultural heritage should be promptly safeguarded through integrated, cross-sectoral and multi-level cooperation at local, national and international levels. Recovery and reconstruction should enable communities to reconnect with their heritage, identity and history, while fully integrating rights-based approaches and considerations of gender, age, disability and cultural diversity. Cultural heritage is understood not only as monuments and sites, but as a broader resource that supports reconstruction, social cohesion, continuity and meaning-making. Full document available here:

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ac1cc7c5-a346-11ef-85f0-01aa75ed71a1>

<sup>10</sup> The first international conference “Cooperation for Resilience” in Uzhorod, brought together 28 partner country delegations, as well as representatives of the European Commission and UNESCO, including ministers and deputy ministers of culture. Participating countries included Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Finland, France,

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together 28 delegations from partner countries (13 of them EU MS), along with representatives from the European Commission and UNESCO, and led to the Uzhhorod [“Declaration on Strengthening the Resilience of the Cultural Sector in Ukraine”](#). As an outcome to the Conference, the Commission further engaged to cultural heritage protection in Ukraine through its Member States, and by providing technical expertise to Ukraine through the study "Case studies on cultural heritage funds in Europe"<sup>11</sup>. The study was published in May 2025 and was intended to take stock of good practices and lessons learnt on heritage funds in Europe, in view of the set up of the Ukrainian Heritage Fund, as recommended by the Uzhhorod Declaration. The study examines cultural heritage funding mechanisms from the EU and beyond, focusing on their governance, funding models, and operations.

In March 2025, UNESCO, with EU funding, launched a two-year [initiative to preserve Ukrainian Jewish documentary heritage](#), aimed at strengthening archival capacity, facilitating research, and enhancing public access to historical records.

At the 4<sup>th</sup> Ukraine Recovery Conference in July 2025, the European Commission announced a major step forward with the unveiling of the [Team Europe approach for Cultural Heritage in Ukraine](#), conceived following the Uzhhorod Conference and responding directly to priorities identified by Ukraine’s Ministry of Culture and Strategic Communications.

The Team Europe approach represents an expansive and coordinated framework involving EU Member States and structured around three core pillars: (1) protection, (2) conservation, and (3) support/capacity building to cultural heritage professionals. It is an evolving exercise, which as of December 2025 encompassed 76 actions by 24 EU Member States and the Commission<sup>12</sup> designed to address both immediate emergency needs and longer-term recovery and resilience in cultural heritage protection and conservation.

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Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden, among others committed to protecting Ukraine’s cultural heritage. The conference reaffirmed the EU’s long-term commitment to safeguarding and restoring cultural heritage, strengthened international cooperation against illicit trafficking, and advanced shared priorities, including the adoption of a common declaration and support for future initiatives.

<https://mcsc.gov.ua/en/news/the-first-international-conference-on-protecting-ukrainian-heritage-brought-together-28-countries/>

<sup>11</sup> Case Studies on Cultural Heritage Funds in Europe - European Expert Network on Culture, May 2025, [https://www.ppv.net.ua/uploads/work\\_attachments/UCHF\\_Case\\_Studies\\_on\\_Cultural\\_Heritage\\_Funds\\_in\\_Europe\\_2025.pdf](https://www.ppv.net.ua/uploads/work_attachments/UCHF_Case_Studies_on_Cultural_Heritage_Funds_in_Europe_2025.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> [https://adr-docs.karlerss.com/Ud3b4mSFmjzxtuszywYEP5y6hZXEql/691-1\\_Matrix-Team\\_Europe\\_approach.pdf](https://adr-docs.karlerss.com/Ud3b4mSFmjzxtuszywYEP5y6hZXEql/691-1_Matrix-Team_Europe_approach.pdf)

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Under the protection pillar, Member States committed to supporting the expansion of shelter and storage opportunities for endangered Ukrainian cultural assets, including venues for the safe storage and exhibition of artefacts at risk. These measures aim to prevent further damage or loss resulting from ongoing hostilities and illicit trafficking.

The conservation pillar focuses on optimizing restoration processes, improving documentation, and accelerating the digitisation of cultural assets, ensuring the preservation of Ukraine's cultural legacy for future generations. Creative Europe further contributed EUR 7 million through a call for proposals targeting culture and cultural heritage in Ukraine. Creative Europe also supported projects aimed at digitising museum registers in cooperation with ICCROM and ICOM. Capacity building remains a cornerstone of EU support. Scholarships, training programmes, and professional exchanges have been offered to Ukrainian students and cultural heritage professionals to strengthen national expertise in heritage conservation and management.

Financially, since the beginning of the war in 2022, the [EU has mobilised over EUR 50 million for Ukraine's culture and creative sectors as of 2025](#) (including over EUR 20 million alone under Creative Europe), of which EUR 11,5 million were allocated specifically to cultural heritage. In October 2024, the European Commission published a special call under Creative Europe to continue supporting the Ukrainian cultural and creative sectors, with a budget of EUR 5 million (after a successful first call had been launched with a budget of EUR 5 million under Creative Europe in 2022; some of the selected projects are a continuation of this call). An additional top-up of EUR 2 million was announced at the Ukrainian Recovery Conference in July 2025, raising the support under this Creative Europe call to a total of EUR 7 million. "[UkrAinian cultural eXchange with European Union \(UAxEU\)](#)", one of the projects funded under this second special call, will define clear qualification requirements for specialists working in art restoration, architectural heritage conservation (wood, metal, plasterwork), and museum preservation – fields where Ukraine currently lacks formal qualification pathways. Furthermore, the Foreign Policy Instrument contributed EUR 2 million to the project "Cultural Heritage as a Vector for Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention", focusing on emergency assistance and protection in central Asia and the eastern neighbourhood, part of which will concur to support [ALIPH's Action Plan for Ukraine](#). Creative Europe complemented these efforts with EUR 1 million for emergency and resilience actions, while also supporting initiatives to counter illicit trafficking and promote digital transformation, topics that are at the core of the work of Michael Culture, one of the Networks of cultural and creative organisations funded by the programme.

Operational support has continued through flagship projects such as House of Europe II, the Creative Europe programme, and other NDICI-funded regional initiatives including EU4Culture. The Culture Moves Europe scheme (also under Creative Europe) maintained

support for the mobility of Ukrainian artists, including a special provision for virtual mobility. Since 2022, the mobility scheme distributed grants to more than 370 Ukrainian artists and cultural professionals worth more than EUR 700,000. Culture Moves Europe extended support not only to those based in Ukraine (around 250), but also to Ukrainian nationals residing in other Creative Europe countries, including refugees. One in four Ukrainian grantees was a resident in another Creative Europe country.

The EU Advisory Mission (EUAM) Ukraine also expanded its engagement by integrating cultural heritage crimes into law enforcement training curricula and strengthening inter-agency cooperation, building on recommendations emerging from expert conferences held in Lviv and Kyiv<sup>13</sup>.

Finally, restrictive measures (sanctions) are an additional axis of concrete action by the EU in support to Ukraine, including on culture and heritage. In its 14<sup>th</sup> sanctions package since Russia's full scale war of aggression began<sup>14</sup> (adopted on 24 June 2024), the Council of the EU prohibited the purchase, import, transfer or export of Ukrainian cultural property goods and other goods of archaeological, historical, cultural, rare scientific or religious importance, and related goods, if there is reasonable suspicion that they have been unlawfully removed from Ukraine. In the 17<sup>th</sup> Russia sanctions package<sup>15</sup> (20 May 2025) the EU listed actors involved in the use of culture and heritage to undermine or threaten the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine, or stability or security in Ukraine.

Looking ahead, the Team Europe Approach will remain a key entry point for EU Member States and Commission support to cultural heritage in Ukraine, in a Team Europe Spirit. EU actions are also developed in line with the [UNESCO Action Plan for Culture in Ukraine](#) and the Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA), which frame priorities such as damage assessment, urgent repairs, institutional recovery, resilience-building, and digital transformation, which indicates that over the next 10 years (2025–2035) the total needs for recovery and reconstruction, including service delivery restoration, should amount to US\$10.5 billion<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> More info in the chapter dedicated to CSDP.

<sup>14</sup> Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/1744 of 24 June 2024 amending Decision 2014/512/CFSP concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

<sup>15</sup> Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

<sup>16</sup> UKRAINE Fourth Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA4) February 2022 – December 2024, © February 2025, the World Bank, the Government of Ukraine, the European Union, the United Nations.

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Together, these actions demonstrate a strong, coordinated international response, combining immediate emergency assistance with longer-term strategic engagement. The EU remains firmly committed to ensuring that Ukraine's cultural heritage and creative sectors emerge from Russia's aggression resilient, safeguarded, and fully integrated into European and global cultural processes.

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**3. CULTURAL HERITAGE AS PART OF THE CSDP**

Since 2021, cultural heritage has been progressively embedded in the political, strategic and operational framework of the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)<sup>17</sup>. The Strategic Compass for Security and Defence reiterates the EU's commitment to contribute to the protection of cultural heritage through CSDP missions and operations, while the 2023 Civilian CSDP Compact<sup>18</sup> underscores the importance to consider actions aimed at preserving and protecting cultural heritage as part of civilian crisis management. This policy orientation is further supported by the mini-concept on cultural heritage for civilian CSDP missions<sup>19</sup>, which provides practical guidance on addressing security challenges linked to cultural heritage within existing mandates and operational plans. This approach is also reflected in the EU's Security and Defence Partnerships<sup>20</sup>, in which cultural heritage is mentioned in the agreements with Albania and North Macedonia – signed at the end of 2024 – further demonstrating its recognition as a component of the EU's broader security and defence engagement.

In line with the Civilian CSDP Compact's emphasis on a more capable, integrated and operationally relevant civilian crisis management, the mainstreaming of cultural heritage across civilian CSDP missions reflects concrete security needs observed in distinct theatres. In Ukraine, systematic destruction of cultural sites, administrative reclassification of heritage in illegally occupied territories and the illicit removal of cultural objects directly threaten accountability for international crimes and require civilian capabilities in investigation, evidence preservation, prosecutorial support and inter-agency coordination. In the Middle East and North Africa, particularly Iraq and Libya, gaps in civilian law-enforcement, border

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<sup>17</sup> Although work on cultural heritage had already been undertaken within CSDP in previous years, the formal and overarching framework for its integration into CSDP is provided by the 2021 EEAS [Concept on Cultural Heritage in Conflicts and Crises \(9962/21\)](#), and the subsequent [Council Conclusions on EU Approach to Cultural Heritage in conflicts and crises \(9837/21\)](#).

<sup>18</sup> Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the establishment of a Civilian CSDP Compact (9588/23).

<sup>19</sup> Civilian CSDP Compact – Mini-concept on possible civilian CSDP efforts to address security challenges linked to the preservation and protection of cultural heritage (12499/22).

<sup>20</sup> [Security and Defence Partnerships](#) constitute a flexible, non-legally binding framework through which the European Union strengthens bilateral cooperation with like-minded non-EU countries in the field of security and defence. Building on existing relationships, these partnerships are tailored to each partner and cover a broad range of areas. They are designed to promote peace, stability and effective multilateral cooperation in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment, and form part of a wider set of arrangements through which the EU engages with international and regional partners.

management and judicial capacities have allowed cultural property to be exploited as a revenue source for organised crime and terrorist networks, positioning cultural heritage protection squarely within civilian tasks related to serious and organised crime, counter-terrorism financing and institutional resilience. In the Western Balkans, notably Kosovo, unresolved political disputes and fragile inter-ethnic relations mean that cultural heritage disputes often intersect with public order, judicial independence and minority rights, requiring sustained civilian monitoring, mediation and confidence-building. Across these contexts, cultural heritage protection enhances the civilian CSDP Compact's core objectives by strengthening civilian institutions, improving inter-agency cooperation, supporting accountability and reducing conflict drivers in environments where cultural heritage is deliberately instrumentalised as part of political pressure, identity contestation and hybrid interference.

During the reporting period, cultural heritage was mainstreamed into operational planning and mission activities. In many theatres, cultural heritage protection intersects with core CSDP objectives, including conflict prevention, rule of law, organised crime prevention, human security, confidence-building and post-conflict recovery. Rather than constituting a stand-alone line of activity, cultural heritage was addressed through existing mission tasks such as monitoring, advising, training, operational coordination and strategic analysis. Several missions explicitly reflect cultural heritage considerations in their OPLANs, Mission Implementation Plans, Human Rights Action Plans or Integrated Border Management frameworks, while others incorporated cultural heritage into conflict analysis, human security assessments and monitoring methodologies. This approach enabled missions to engage on cultural heritage within their existing mandates, while ensuring coherence with EU policy priorities.

At institutional level, the Civilian Operations Headquarters (CIVOPSHQ) continued to consolidate its coordinating role. Since 2023, CIVOPSHQ has designated a dedicated focal point for cultural heritage protection and established a specialised cultural heritage protection network among civilian CSDP missions. During the period this network became fully operational, facilitating regular exchanges of good practices, identification of operational challenges and improved coordination between headquarters and the field. By December 2025, 8 civilian CSDP missions were active members of the network, had identified cultural heritage focal points, and were regularly engaging with national authorities as well as EU and international stakeholders.

Training remained a key enabling factor. Cultural heritage protection continued to be integrated into training programmes of the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) and into the joint civilian-military CSDP pre-deployment training.

Across the six civilian CSDP missions that actively worked on this topic during the reporting period, operational engagement on cultural heritage can be broadly grouped into four strands: (1) strengthening legal, policy and strategic frameworks; (2) enhancing operational and investigative capacities; (3) improving inter-institutional and international cooperation; and (4) supporting monitoring, confidence-building and human security.

First, missions provided sustained strategic and legal advice to national authorities aimed at strengthening policy frameworks related to cultural heritage protection. This included support to the development of national strategies, contributions to legal analyses and prosecutorial guidance, and advice on aligning domestic frameworks with international and European standards. In conflict-affected contexts, particular attention was given to accountability for crimes against cultural heritage, including their qualification as international crimes or organised crime-related offences.

Second, capacity building and operational support constituted a core component of mission engagement. During the reporting period, missions delivered a wide range of training activities targeting investigators, prosecutors, border guards, customs officials, police and security services. These activities increasingly adopted multi-agency and Training-of-Trainers approaches, enabling the cascading of expertise within national institutions. Training topics included the investigation and prosecution of crimes against cultural heritage, illicit trafficking of cultural objects, emergency response and salvage operations, temporary storage of artefacts, and the links between cultural heritage crime, organised crime and terrorism financing. In parallel, missions supported the deployment of technological tools, including databases for stolen cultural property, and facilitated the collection, management and exchange of data relevant to criminal investigations and international cooperation.

Third, strengthening cooperation and coordination emerged as a central added value of civilian CSDP engagement. Missions acted as conveners, bringing together ministries of culture, law-enforcement agencies, intelligence services, prosecutors and border authorities, often for the first time in a structured manner. Regular coordination formats – such as roundtables, joint workshops and technical working meetings – improved information exchange, joint planning and operational coordination at national level. At international level, missions engaged closely with EU agencies (including EUROPOL, EUROJUST, FRONTEX and SATCEN), INTERPOL, UNODC, UNITAD, WCO, NATO and other partners, ensuring complementarity and facilitating access to specialised expertise. Study visits and professional exchanges with EU Member State authorities further supported the transfer of European best practices.

Fourth, in contexts characterised by active or protracted conflicts and restricted access, missions contributed to cultural heritage protection primarily through monitoring, reporting and confidence-building. Cultural heritage considerations were integrated into human security

patrols, monitoring of sensitive sites, analysis of satellite imagery and dialogue with local communities. Missions paid particular attention to the impact of conflict, displacement and movement restrictions on access to cultural and religious sites, as well as to risks stemming from neglect, unauthorised alterations, appropriation of heritage and the proximity of military infrastructure. Through confidence-building instruments and structured dialogue platforms, missions supported access to cultural heritage and religious practices, while adhering to a strict “do no harm” principle.

Despite tangible progress during the reporting period, several challenges remain. These include limited national capacities and resources, the absence or fragmentation of comprehensive cultural heritage inventories, uneven inter-institutional coordination, and the continued need for more specialised investigative skills, particularly in areas such as open-source intelligence and geospatial analysis. Engagement is further complicated by political sensitivities, restricted access to contested or occupied areas, and the risk of instrumentalisation of cultural heritage for ethnic and/or political purposes. An additional, persistent challenge concerns the availability and continuity of specialised or dedicated cultural heritage expertise within missions, which is essential to sustain engagement and ensure long-term impact.

At the same time, the tasks effectively performed highlighted the comparative advantages of civilian CSDP missions in this field: their ability to operate across institutional silos, to link cultural heritage protection with security, rule of law and human security objectives, and to combine operational engagement with long-term strategic advice. The establishment of dedicated focal points within missions and the functioning of the cultural heritage protection network under CIVOPSHQ proved instrumental in ensuring coherence, continuity and institutional learning across missions.

EUAM Ukraine benefited from the deployment of a visiting expert from the Art and Antiques Crime Unit of the Netherlands Police, which supported the Mission in strengthening practical cooperation between Ukrainian authorities and EU specialised law-enforcement services. The expert played a key role in the preparation of a workshop that brought together EU specialised law-enforcement units and the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture, facilitating concrete exchanges on investigative approaches, institutional coordination and challenges related to cultural heritage crime. This experience further confirmed the added value of deploying officers with specialised expertise within civilian CSDP missions. Similar benefits have been observed through the continued contribution of a Carabinieri TPC officer serving as Senior Strategic Adviser in EUAM Iraq, as well as through the visiting expert deployed to EUMM Georgia in 2023, particularly in supporting monitoring and analytical work related to cultural heritage.

At the same time, consistency over time is essential. Experience has shown that engagement on cultural heritage protection can be affected by fluctuating levels of cooperation from

national counterparts, institutional changes or shifting political priorities. In such situations, the presence of dedicated expertise on the ground is crucial to preserve continuity, maintain dialogue and, where necessary, rebuild cooperation. This underlines the importance of sustaining this work strand across different theatres and over longer timeframes. Consistency can be ensured through continued follow-up from headquarters, the deployment of specialised expertise within missions, structured internal knowledge-sharing, and the regular provision of targeted expert support. Taken together, these elements enable incremental progress and continuous improvement, even in complex and evolving operational contexts.

Overall, the period under review marked a qualitative step forward in the operationalisation of cultural heritage within civilian CSDP. By embedding cultural heritage considerations into existing operational documents and activities, missions demonstrated that cultural heritage protection can effectively contribute to CSDP efforts, in line with mandates and with tangible results. Continued investment in coordination, training and knowledge-sharing—both within missions and between CIVOPSHQ, EU institutions and international partners—will be essential to consolidate these gains and further strengthen the EU’s contribution to cultural heritage protection as part of its peace and security agenda.

See Annex 1 for a more detailed analysis of the activities performed by civilian CSDP missions in the reporting period.

#### 4. FIGHT AGAINST ILLICIT TRAFFICKING OF CULTURAL PROPERTY

The illicit trade in cultural property remains a concern for the EU in an evolving global criminal landscape. The expansion of online sales channels and the impact of ongoing conflicts – notably Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine and instability across parts of the Middle East – are likely to contribute to increased trafficking flows towards the European market<sup>21</sup>. Reports from Member States already indicate that cultural objects have been stolen in Ukraine and trafficked into the EU, while similar risks are anticipated from conflict-affected areas in the Middle East. At the same time, the digitalisation of the art market, including the growing use of online platforms and non-fungible tokens (NFTs), creates new opportunities for criminal exploitation by enabling anonymity, rapid transactions and cross-border sales. Cultural property trafficking remains a highly specialised criminal activity involving organised networks, corrupt intermediaries and expert actors with detailed knowledge of archaeology, provenance and market demand. Economic instability, ongoing illicit excavations in affected regions and the relative stability of art as an asset class further increase the attractiveness of cultural goods for investment, including for money-laundering purposes, thereby reinforcing the links between cultural property trafficking, organised crime and broader illicit financial activities<sup>22</sup>.

The EU Action Plan against trafficking in cultural goods<sup>23</sup> and the related Council conclusions<sup>24</sup> remain a pivotal reference point in the EU’s fight against the illicit trade in cultural property, providing the strategic framework for operational and external action in this field. In this context, the [Cultural Heritage Expert Subgroup on the Dialogue with the Art Market](#) provides a platform for structured exchange between public authorities, cultural institutions, and art market stakeholders, addressing due diligence, transparency, traceability and provenance – including for objects from countries outside the EU – thereby supporting the implementation of the Action Plan and fostering practical cooperation with the private sector. Also in this context, a [study on measures to increase the traceability of cultural goods](#) at Member State and EU level was commissioned as part of the implementation of the Action Plan. Published in December 2025, the study highlights that effective traceability remains

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<sup>21</sup> [Europol, European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment – The changing DNA of serious and organised crime. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2025](#)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Action Plan against Trafficking in Cultural Goods ([COM\(2022\) 800 final](#))

<sup>24</sup> Council Conclusions on the fight against trafficking in cultural goods – Council conclusions (8 June 2023) ([10249/23](#))

uneven across the Union, with significant differences in documentation practices, inventories and data-sharing mechanisms between national authorities and market actors. It identifies persistent gaps in provenance information, limited interoperability between databases used by law-enforcement, customs and cultural institutions, and insufficiently harmonised due-diligence requirements for the art market, including online sales. The study concludes that improving traceability is a key enabler in preventing illicit trafficking, facilitating investigations and restitution, and addressing related risks such as money laundering.

Across 2024 and 2025, operational cooperation remained a central pillar of the EU response. Europol's Serious and Organised Threat Assessment of March 2025 includes a section on cultural goods trafficking<sup>25</sup>. Law-enforcement action under the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) framework continued to target organised property crime, including offences involving cultural goods. In this context, international operations coordinated with Europol, INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization demonstrated the persistent scale and transnational nature of trafficking networks, including their increasing reliance on online marketplaces and digital tools<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, through its special point of contact for cultural goods trafficking, Europol also supported significant operations in the fight against cultural goods trafficking beyond EMPACT, including operations concerning cultural goods trafficking with a third country dimension<sup>27</sup>.

In November 2024 the [EU Global Facility on Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism \(AML/CFT\)](#) organized the regional conference on “The Use of AML/CFT in the Investigation of Art and Antiquities Criminality” in Siem Reap province in Cambodia. This regional conference aimed to strengthen inter-agency cooperation and share

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<sup>25</sup> [Europol, European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment – The changing DNA of serious and organised crime, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2025.](#)

<sup>26</sup> In 2024, Operation Pandora IX, a major international law-enforcement action coordinated by Spain with support from Europol, INTERPOL, and the World Customs Organization, led to 80 arrests and the seizure of over 37,700 cultural goods, including archaeological artefacts, artworks, coins, musical instruments, and looting equipment. The operation, involving authorities from 23 countries, highlighted the persistent threat of organised trafficking in cultural property, increasingly facilitated through online marketplaces and social media, and underscored the importance of international cooperation, data sharing, and cyber-patrols in combating transnational cultural-property crime. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/80-arrests-and-more-37-700-cultural-goods-seized-in-major-art-trafficking-bust>

<sup>27</sup> See for example [35 arrests in Bulgaria in a large art trafficking investigation - The criminal network is investigated for the trafficking of cultural goods; the invaluable antiquities have allegedly been looted from countries across the Balkans | Europol](#)

knowledge in monitoring and investigating illicit trade activities to protect art and antiquities with a total of 70 participants of national and international experts from 10 countries in Asia<sup>28</sup>.

From 8 to 10 April 2025, the [EuroMed Justice VI Project](#) hosted a technical assistance activity in Cairo, Egypt, to address the protection of cultural heritage and the combat against its illicit trafficking. Organized by Eurojust and funded by the European Union, the event gathered judicial experts, law enforcement, and representatives from international organizations like UNESCO and UNODC to strengthen cross-border cooperation. Participants shared success stories of artifact repatriation while discussing the necessity for specialized national units, digital databases, and the use of Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) to disrupt the criminal networks and money laundering activities associated with looting. The meeting concluded with a call for harmonized legislation and increased use of international tools to ensure the swift seizure and return of trafficked cultural assets.

At the international level, thematic discussions increasingly focused on new trafficking modalities. In June 2025, UNESCO convened a global conference in Paris on [illicit trafficking of cultural property in the digital era](#), highlighting the growing role of online platforms and the need for cooperation between public authorities, cultural professionals and private actors. These discussions were directly relevant to EU efforts to address digital risks within both internal market regulation and external action.

On 28 June 2025, [Regulation \(EU\) 2019/880](#) on the introduction and import of cultural goods became fully applicable, following the deployment of the centralised EU import control system for cultural goods. This milestone established uniform import requirements across the EU, including import licences and importer statements for specific categories of cultural property, significantly strengthening customs controls and provenance verification and reducing the risk of illicitly exported cultural property entering the EU market<sup>29</sup>.

Several Horizon Europe funded initiatives addressing the illicit trafficking of cultural property reached completion toward the end of 2025, notably [ENIGMA](#), [AURORA](#), [ANCHISE](#) and [RITHMS](#). At the same time the ISF funded [SWOADS](#) project, already active and functional, continues its efforts. Another ISF project [DULCINEA II](#) develops a platform improving the detection, analysis and monitoring of suspicious activities using advanced tools and new methodologies adapted to the current digital and interconnected operational environment. The focus is on trafficking of cultural property linked to organised crime that threatens Europe's

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<sup>28</sup> [2024 annual report of the Cambodian Financial Intelligence Unit](#). Media from the event can be found on the [Global Facility website](#).

<sup>29</sup> [EU introduces new import controls of cultural goods](#)

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historical heritage. The platform will include an analytical engine and integration with external solutions such as SWOADS.

These projects developed a range of innovative tools and instruments to support law enforcement, prosecutors, and cultural authorities in detecting, investigating, and preventing trafficking in cultural property. It is anticipated that these instruments will eventually be made widely available through [Europol Innovation Lab](#) to law enforcement, enhancing operational capacities, cross-border cooperation, and intelligence sharing.

Looking ahead, the [Horizon Europe Work Programme 2026–2027 for Cluster 2 “Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society”](#) foresees the launch of a dedicated action targeting the prevention and countering of cultural property trafficking. This initiative is expected to build on the results of previous projects, support the development of new tools, and foster research and innovation partnerships that can provide law enforcement and cultural authorities with cutting-edge instruments to detect and prevent illicit trafficking of cultural goods across borders.

Preparatory work is ongoing also for the implementation of the [Commission Implementing Decision of 28 October 2024](#) financing the multiannual action plan for the Southern Neighbourhood (2024-2026), which includes support to combat trafficking in cultural property as part of its broader good-governance and security package. The action foresees assistance to partner countries to strengthen law-enforcement and judicial cooperation against organised crime, including illicit trafficking of cultural goods, through capacity-building, improved investigations, and enhanced cross-border cooperation. It also aims to reinforce institutional frameworks, information-sharing, and coordination with EU agencies and international partners to address criminal networks operating across the region, including those exploiting cultural heritage. These measures are embedded within wider efforts to improve rule of law, financial-crime detection (including money-laundering links), and regional security cooperation. The action will focus on the ten EU Southern Neighbourhood partner countries in the MENA region and started in march 2026.

Complementing EU internal and global efforts, the [EL PAcCTO 2.0](#) programme continues to strengthen partnerships with Latin American and Caribbean countries to combat transnational organised crime, including the trafficking of cultural goods. Building on the achievements of EL PAcCTO, the programme combines law enforcement cooperation, capacity building, and judicial support with a focus on human rights, gender, and inclusive approaches. Specific actions target criminal networks involved in the illicit trade of cultural property, supporting investigations, information exchange, and preventive measures, while also addressing the economic dimensions of organised crime.

As part of broader capacity-building efforts to counter illicit trafficking in cultural property, the European Union supported a Twinning project in the Republic of North Macedonia on [Strengthening the institutional capacities in dealing with cultural heritage and environmental crimes](#). Financed under EU pre-accession assistance and implemented in cooperation with the Italian Carabinieri Command for the protection of Cultural Heritage and the North Macedonian Ministry of Interior, the project aimed to enhance strategic, operational and institutional frameworks for preventing, investigating and prosecuting crimes against cultural heritage and related environmental offences. Activities included the creation of specialised capacities, development of standard operating procedures, training for operational staff and improved inter-institutional coordination. Launched with a kick-off event in Skopje in November 2024, the project strengthened investigative and cooperation mechanisms and was concluded in January 2026.

At the political level, cultural heritage protection and the fight against illicit trafficking continued to have relevant international visibility.

The Joint Declaration between the EU and CLASI (Latin American Committee on Internal Security), agreed in Brussels on 5 March 2025, explicitly includes trafficking in cultural goods within its shared priority areas in the fight against organised crime. Ministers committed to intensifying joint efforts not only against drug trafficking but also against other key crime areas, including “organised property crime, trafficking in cultural goods and the criminal use of cryptocurrencies”<sup>30</sup>. In the Annex establishing the 2025–2026 Roadmap for operational cooperation, trafficking in cultural goods is further embedded under priority investigations targeting the most threatening criminal networks, alongside crimes such as trafficking in human beings, firearms trafficking, cybercrime, environmental crime, corruption and money laundering. The Declaration frames this cooperation within strengthened use of EMPACT-style operational action plans, enhanced information exchange, joint investigations (including JITs), and reinforced collaboration with Europol, Eurojust and Ameripol, treating trafficking in cultural property as an integral component of transnational organised crime to be addressed through intelligence-led and follow-the-money approaches<sup>31</sup>.

In November 2025, G20 Culture Ministers adopted the KwaDukuza Declaration, which reiterated concern over the continued theft, looting, and illicit trafficking of cultural property, including through online markets and digital platforms, often linked to illicit financial flows.

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<sup>30</sup> Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Interior and/or Security of the Member States of the European Union and the Ministers with responsibility for security matters of the Member States of the Latin American Committee on Internal Security (EU-CLASI Joint Declaration) ([6403/25](#)).

<sup>31</sup> Annex to the joint declaration: EU-CLASI 2025-2026 Roadmap to implement operational cooperation priorities.

The declaration welcomed efforts to recognise and address these challenges, particularly through bilateral dialogue and multilateral mechanisms<sup>32</sup>. Complementing these ministerial outcomes, the G20 Leaders' Declaration adopted at the 2025 summit reaffirmed the importance attached by countries to the return or restitution of cultural property to their countries of origin, recognising its value in strengthening social cohesion, and reaffirmed support for open and inclusive dialogue on this issue<sup>33</sup>.

Together, these declarations align closely with existing EU principles, reinforcing the international framework that supports both internal and external EU action against trafficking in cultural goods, including measures on provenance research, restitution mechanisms, and multilateral cooperation with institutions such as UNESCO and INTERPOL.

A major strategic development occurred in November 2025, when the European Commission adopted the [Culture Compass for Europe](#), a new overarching framework for EU cultural policy. The Culture Compass places culture and cultural heritage at the centre of EU values, identity, resilience and international engagement. It explicitly recognises the need to safeguard cultural heritage and to combat illicit trafficking as part of a comprehensive approach linking cultural policy with security, sustainability and external relations. Through its flagship actions, the Culture Compass promotes improved preservation, digitalisation, data use and cooperation, creating synergies with existing EU instruments addressing cultural property crime.

The Culture Compass also strengthens the policy link between internal EU measures – such as import controls, law-enforcement cooperation and judicial action – and external cultural relations, including support to partner countries affected by conflict, instability and structural vulnerabilities to trafficking.

As indicated in the chapter related to Ukraine, the EU has incorporated measures addressing the protection of cultural heritage within its broader sanctions framework following Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine through the 14<sup>th</sup> sanctions package, adopted on 24 June 2024 and the 17<sup>th</sup> sanctions package, adopted on 20 May 2025.

Finally, EU CSDP missions have supported local authorities in combating trafficking of cultural property through capacity-building and advisory activities. EUAM Iraq and EUAM Ukraine focused on advice, training and legislative guidance, while EUBAM Libya worked to strengthen border controls and institutional coordination. More details are provided in the dedicated chapter on CSDP engagement.

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<sup>32</sup> [KwaDukuza Declaration of the G20 Ministers of Culture, KwaDukuza, November 3, 2025](#).

<sup>33</sup> [G20 South Africa Summit: Leaders' Declaration, Johannesburg, November 22, 2025](#).

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Across the 2024–2025 period, a clear convergence emerged between EU regulatory and operational measures, strategic cultural policy, and global political commitments. G20 conclusions reinforced the international consensus on the need to address illicit trafficking through prevention, enforcement and capacity building, while EU action translated these principles into concrete regulatory, operational and policy instruments.

Together, these developments demonstrate the EU’s evolving approach to trafficking in cultural property: moving beyond isolated enforcement actions towards a more integrated model that combines regulation, security cooperation, cultural policy and international partnerships. This integrated approach provides a strengthened basis for continued EU engagement in protecting cultural heritage and countering illicit trafficking into 2026.

**5. SUSTAINABLE PROTECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Over the years, the European Union, in close cooperation with international organisations, Member States, civil society and local authorities, has designed and implemented a broad portfolio of cultural heritage-related projects worldwide. These actions go well beyond preservation alone: they strengthen institutional capacities, support legal and policy reforms, foster reconciliation and social cohesion, and contribute to sustainable development, peacebuilding and economic recovery. EU Delegations play a central role in identifying needs, coordinating stakeholders and ensuring that cultural heritage is integrated into wider external action priorities.

Across regions, EU-funded initiatives address both tangible and intangible heritage through a combination of site rehabilitation, capacity-building, fight against illicit trafficking, community engagement and support to cultural and creative sectors. Particular emphasis is placed on strengthening governance frameworks, improving prevention and investigation capacities against cultural property crime, enhancing museum and archive security, and promoting participatory and inclusive heritage management. Many projects also link heritage protection to youth empowerment, gender equality, intercultural dialogue and local economic development, including tourism and creative industries.

In Europe and the neighbourhood region, actions focus strongly on institutional strengthening, regional cooperation and alignment with EU standards. In the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries, projects tackle illicit trafficking, reinforce law enforcement and judicial capacities, rehabilitate heritage sites affected by natural disasters or conflict, and promote reconciliation through museums, cultural spaces and creative industries. In Ukraine, in particular, EU support combines emergency protection of war-affected heritage with longer-term recovery, professional exchanges and integration into European cultural networks.

In the Middle East and North Africa, EU-funded projects combine heritage conservation with post-conflict recovery, social cohesion and national capacity-building. Actions range from the rehabilitation of archaeological sites and historic buildings to the creation of restoration schools, training of tourism police and law enforcement, support to legal reform processes, digital preservation of collective memory, and revitalisation of cultural and creative industries affected by crisis. These initiatives contribute to stabilisation efforts while fostering inclusive public spaces and intercommunal dialogue.

In Asia, projects use culture-based approaches to peacebuilding and conflict prevention, particularly through youth engagement, culturally embedded education modules and support to civil society. Cultural heritage and creative expression are mobilised as tools to reduce drivers of violence, strengthen local identities and promote inclusive narratives of peace.

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In Sub-Saharan Africa, EU support links cultural heritage with environmental protection, local governance and social cohesion. Actions include archaeological research, inventorying and safeguarding of sites, promotion of intangible heritage, youth-led artistic initiatives, and the use of culture as a lever for dialogue and resilience in fragile regions.

Finally, in Central and South America, EU interventions emphasise cultural rights, Indigenous heritage protection, community empowerment and inclusive development. Projects strengthen civil society organisations, support territorial and cultural rights of Indigenous peoples, promote gender-transformative cultural practices, and connect cultural heritage with environmental sustainability and intercultural dialogue.

Overall, the portfolio demonstrates that cultural heritage is not treated as a stand-alone sector, but as a cross-cutting component of the EU's external action—contributing to governance, security, reconciliation, sustainable development and resilience across diverse geopolitical contexts.

See Annex 2 for a detailed list of projects implemented per region.

## **6. CULTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION WITHIN THE EU PREPAREDNESS FRAMEWORK**

The Preparedness Union Strategy<sup>34</sup>, approved by the European Commission in March 2025, establishes the overarching framework for strengthening the EU’s capacity to anticipate, prevent, withstand and respond to complex and interconnected crises, including natural disasters, man-made hazards and conflict-related emergencies. Within the EU institutional architecture, DG ECHO, through its mandate for humanitarian aid and European civil protection, and the EEAS contribute to the implementation of the Preparedness Union Strategy.

The Strategy adopts a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, recognising that crises generate cascading effects across sectors, infrastructures and communities. Within this comprehensive framework, cultural heritage is identified among the “sectors/areas for broader societal resilience” and among the areas in which there is a necessity to “embed resilience and preparedness in the EU’s external action”.

Cultural heritage–related actions could be implemented since they are linked to humanitarian and civil protection objectives. Such actions are carried out within the framework of funded interventions, notably when damage to cultural or religious sites has direct humanitarian implications. These include risks to civilian safety, disruption of essential community spaces, and increased inter-communal tensions.

A more explicit operational pathway for cultural heritage protection has been developed within the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM), which is a core instrument for EU-level preparedness and emergency response.

With the adoption of Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2025/704<sup>35</sup>, Cultural Heritage Protection (CHP) has been formally introduced as a civil protection module under Annex II of the UCPM. This regulatory development recognises cultural heritage as a civilian asset exposed to disaster and conflict-related risks, and as one element among others contributing to societal resilience.

The CHP module is intended to provide:

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<sup>34</sup> Joint Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European Preparedness Union Strategy ([JOIN\(2025\) 130 final](#))

<sup>35</sup> Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2025/704 of 10 April 2025 laying down rules for the implementation of Decision No 1313/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism and repealing Commission Implementing Decisions 2014/762/EU and (EU) 2019/1310 (notified under document [C\(2025\) 2130](#))

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- Specialised expertise for the emergency protection of cultural heritage affected by disasters and crises;
- Support to civil protection operations through risk assessment and/or damage assessment, cultural heritage emergency management, cultural heritage information management, emergency planning and damage mitigation techniques, securing, recovering cultural heritage assets, providing support to Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA), stabilisation and coordination functions;
- Improved interoperability between civil protection services and cultural heritage professionals based on requesting the deployment of an appropriate team of experts from disaster management and cultural heritage protection agencies;

While no cultural heritage protection module has yet been certified and registered within the European Civil Protection Pool (ECPP), one Member State has now formally offered such a module to the ECPP. It will become a registered ECPP capacity for an initial period of 3 years after completing the ECPP certification. Other Member States are progressively working towards the development of deployable capacities.

Despite the absence of a certified CHP module, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism has already been mobilised in support of cultural heritage protection in Ukraine following the Russian war of aggression<sup>36</sup>.

Within the broader UCPM response, Member States have provided targeted material assistance, equipment and expertise relevant to the safeguarding of cultural heritage, including protective materials for museums and historic buildings and equipment for emergency stabilisation. These actions were delivered as part of civil protection assistance, demonstrating that cultural heritage protection can be operationalised under the UCPM as a cross-cutting component of emergency response.

The operational experience gained in Ukraine has highlighted both the relevance of cultural heritage protection in armed conflict and the added value of developing pre-certified, specialised capacities under the UCPM.

Preparedness for cultural heritage protection under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism has been progressively strengthened through a combination of methodological development, capacity-building activities and large-scale exercises.

The [PROCULTHER](#) initiative, funded by the UCPM, has played a central role in this process by supporting the development of a common European approach to cultural heritage protection in emergencies and by fostering professional networks linking civil protection authorities and cultural heritage experts. Building on lessons learned from Member States' operational

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<sup>36</sup> See previous progress reports.

experience, PROCULTHER has delivered targeted capacity-building activities, including workshops aimed at updating trained experts on recent regulatory developments and revised methodologies. In parallel, the PROCULTHER [Technical Bulletin](#) has provided a dedicated platform for information sharing and knowledge exchange among practitioners. The latest iteration of the PROCULTHER project, already approved, will start in 2026 with an aim to expand the activities with a whole-of-society approach.

Operational preparedness has been further reinforced through EU MODEX exercises, notably the EU MODEX Venice exercise, conducted from 17 to 20 October 2024. This exercise tested multi-sector disaster-response scenarios involving cultural heritage assets, bringing together civil protection teams and cultural heritage specialists in a realistic operational setting. The exercise generated practical lessons, in particular with regard to coordination between civil protection and cultural heritage actors, the integration of cultural heritage protection tasks into emergency response chains, and the operational requirements for potential future deployments<sup>37</sup>. These lessons continue to inform the development of cultural heritage protection capacities under the UCPM.

Beyond activities and exercises, the PROCULTHER methodology<sup>38</sup> constitutes a key outcome guideline in this field. It provides a structured and shared operational framework that translates cultural heritage protection needs into procedures compatible with civil protection and emergency management systems. By embedding cultural heritage protection within standard disaster management phases and decision-making processes, the methodology facilitates interoperability and effective cooperation between civil protection authorities and cultural heritage professionals. Its focus on emergency stabilisation, risk mitigation and coordination – rather than long-term conservation – makes it particularly relevant in disaster and conflict-related emergencies and provides a practical foundation for the future development and deployment of cultural heritage protection capacities under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism.

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<sup>37</sup> Overview of cultural heritage activities at EU MODEX Venice 2024, can be found here:

<https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/media/cultural-heritage-activities-eu-modex-venice-2024>

<sup>38</sup> [PROCULTHER Project. Title: Key Elements of a European Methodology to Address the Protection of Cultural Heritage during Emergencies. Città di Castello: LuoghInteriori, 2021. ISBN 978-88-6864-370-6.](#)

## **7. WAY FORWARD AND CONCLUSIONS**

The 2024–2025 period confirms that cultural heritage protection has consolidated its role as an integral component of the European Union’s external action and internal policy architecture. Across conflict zones, neighbourhood regions and global partnerships, the EU has progressively strengthened a model that links emergency response, civilian crisis management, sanctions, law-enforcement cooperation, regulatory measures and development programming. The actions described in this report demonstrate a continued effort to operationalise cultural heritage protection through existing instruments and mandates.

A central lesson emerging from the reporting period is the necessity for fully integrating the internal and external dimensions of EU action. The fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property illustrates how internal market regulation, customs controls and law-enforcement cooperation must be closely connected with capacity-building, judicial reform and operational partnerships in source and transit countries. Similarly, experience from civilian CSDP missions shows how heritage protection intersects with security, rule of law, accountability and human security objectives in fragile and conflict-affected environments. The development of cultural heritage protection capacities under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism further strengthens the bridge between internal preparedness and external crisis response.

An integrated approach is indispensable in an increasingly complex risk landscape. Cultural heritage destruction, illicit excavations, digital trafficking channels and hybrid interference are often embedded in organised crime networks, conflict economies and broader strategies of destabilisation. Addressing these challenges requires the coherent mobilisation of diplomatic, security, regulatory, financial and operational tools, in close coordination with Member States and international partners.

The adoption in 2025 of the Culture Compass for Europe represents an important strategic milestone in this broader framework. While the initiatives presented in this report are not a direct result of the Culture Compass, its adoption provides a renewed and structured orientation for future EU action. By identifying culture and cultural heritage as an important pillar of the Union’s values-based agenda and international engagement, the Culture Compass is expected to strengthen policy coherence, guide future programming cycles and reinforce the links between cultural policy, security, resilience and external relations.

The reporting period also highlights the importance of maintaining a forward-looking analytical capacity alongside ongoing operational engagement. While the report focuses on contexts where EU action is already underway, other conflict-affected situations – such as Gaza, Sudan and Syria – continue to illustrate the acute vulnerability of cultural heritage in environments marked by active hostilities, institutional fragility or protracted instability. In parallel to the actions described, the EU is undertaking assessments to examine the feasibility, added value and appropriate modalities for possible future engagement in these and other theatres, considering security conditions, humanitarian considerations, political sensitivities

and partnership frameworks. This forward-looking and preparatory dimension is essential to ensure that any future interventions are timely, coherent and aligned with the EU's integrated approach to conflicts and crises.

Looking ahead, sustained efforts will be required to ensure policy coherence, continuity of expertise, adequate resourcing and structured knowledge-sharing across institutions and missions. In this context, the strategic guidance provided by the existing policies, including now the Culture Compass, is expected to contribute to shaping a more consistent and forward-looking framework for cultural heritage protection.

By embedding the protection of cultural heritage within the Union's integrated approach to conflicts and crises, the EU reaffirms that safeguarding heritage is not a peripheral activity, but a strategic dimension of its commitment to peace, stability, resilience and effective multilateral cooperation in an increasingly complex global environment.

**Annex 1: ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED BY CIVILIAN CSDP MISSIONS**

This Annex contains a detailed overview of the activities devised by the six civilian missions active in implementing the concept in the reporting period.

**European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) in Iraq**

EUAM Iraq supports national authorities in strengthening the protection and promotion of cultural heritage as a key component of peace, social cohesion and security in Iraq. The Mission provides strategic and operational advice to enhance policy-making, legal frameworks and inter-institutional coordination related to cultural heritage protection at both ministerial and local levels. In parallel, EUAM Iraq contributes to building national capacity to prevent and combat cultural heritage-related crimes, which are often linked to organised crime and the financing of terrorist activities.

A core element of the Mission's engagement is the strengthening of cooperation among Iraqi stakeholders involved in cultural heritage protection. EUAM Iraq has facilitated renewed and constructive collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and its operational body, the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH), as well as with key law-enforcement and security actors, including the Federal Intelligence and Investigation Agency (FIIA), the Heritage and Antiquities Protection Police (HAPP), the Iraqi National Intelligence Service (INIS) and INTERPOL Iraq. To this end, the Mission has established a series of regular roundtable meetings bringing together all relevant counterparts, aimed at improving information exchange, joint strategic planning and operational coordination.

A major achievement during the reporting period was the completion of Phase II of the Pilot National Cultural Heritage Protection (CHP) Database project, funded by Germany. Despite temporary challenges affecting cooperation with national counterparts, EUAM Iraq ensured the successful delivery of 100% of the hardware and software to the Federal Intelligence and Investigation Agency (FIIA) by the end of December 2024. The database significantly strengthens Iraq's capacity to investigate crimes affecting cultural heritage, to systematically collect and manage data on stolen artefacts, and to support recovery efforts and international cooperation. In addition, the Mission facilitated the collection of images of stolen cultural objects from both Iraqi and international agencies and supported the installation of the system, as well as the training of end users within FIIA.

In parallel, EUAM Iraq has intensified its advisory role on capacity building and training. The Mission has promoted a shift towards Train-of-Trainers (ToT) approaches, targeting senior-level officers who can subsequently cascade knowledge to lower-ranking personnel. This includes the preparation of a two-week specialised workshop, organised in cooperation with the Italian Carabinieri for the Protection of Cultural Heritage and experts from the Italian Ministry of Culture, focusing on emergency response, salvage of cultural property, temporary storage, and post-disaster or post-conflict interventions. The Mission has also integrated cultural heritage considerations into broader discussions on organised crime, including anti-money-laundering activities and potential links between trafficking networks and cultural heritage crimes.

EUAM Iraq actively promotes dialogue on longer-term strategic planning. During the reporting period, the Mission initiated discussions with Iraqi authorities on the development of a National Strategy for Cultural Heritage Protection, intended to provide coherent, long-term guidance and to strengthen coordination among national institutions and international partners. This strategic reflection is complemented by efforts to address one of Iraq's most pressing challenges: the absence of a comprehensive national inventory of cultural heritage, despite the existence of more than 9,900 registered cultural sites, many of them located in remote and difficult-to-secure areas.

The Mission also places strong emphasis on cooperation with international and EU partners. During the reporting period, EUAM Iraq engaged with NATO Mission Iraq on human security aspects, cooperated with INTERPOL, EUROPOL, EUROJUST, FRONTEX, SATCEN and UNODC, and exchanged best practices with other CSDP missions, including EUAM Ukraine. A study visit to Italy, organised with the Carabinieri and the University for Foreigners of Siena, further supported the sharing of European best practices in cultural heritage protection and valorisation.

Overall, EUAM Iraq's engagement in the field of cultural heritage reflects a comprehensive approach that combines legal and policy advice, operational capacity building, technological support and inter-agency coordination. By reinforcing Iraq's ability to safeguard its tangible and intangible cultural heritage, the Mission contributes not only to the protection of cultural assets, but also to broader objectives of security, resilience and sustainable recovery.

### **European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) Ukraine**

Cultural heritage protection is explicitly reflected in EUAM Ukraine's operational framework. The Mission's OPLAN identifies cultural heritage as a priority area within its support to the investigation and prosecution of international crimes. In parallel, cultural heritage is addressed under the Integrated Border Management (IBM) strategy, where EUAM Ukraine supports Ukrainian authorities in preventing and combating all forms of smuggling, including the illicit trafficking of cultural objects.

In line with this mandate, EUAM Ukraine contributes to peace and security by strengthening the capacity of Ukrainian authorities to investigate and prosecute crimes affecting cultural heritage, both as international crimes and as organised crime-related offences. The Mission addresses systematic attacks against cultural heritage and supports accountability efforts through targeted legal, strategic and operational assistance.

During the reporting period, EUAM Ukraine has worked closely with the Office of the Prosecutor General (OPG) and international partners. The Mission participates in the Atrocity Crimes Advisory (ACA) group's cluster on cultural heritage, providing legal expertise to the specialised prosecutorial team dealing with crimes against cultural heritage. EUAM Ukraine coordinated the first draft of a national strategy on prosecuting crimes affecting cultural heritage, co-authoring the legal section together with the International Development Law Organisation (IDLO). The draft was submitted to the OPG in January 2025 and followed by an

extensive feedback session hosted by EUAM Ukraine in March 2025, organised jointly with the Pravo-Justice project.

Capacity-building has remained a core element of EUAM Ukraine's engagement. Between 27 and 29 May 2024, the Mission organised two workshops in Lviv on crimes affecting cultural heritage. For the first time, illicit trafficking of cultural objects was addressed in a multi-agency setting involving investigators, prosecutors, customs authorities and border guards. The workshops included contributions from UNODC, the World Customs Organization and UNITAD. Additional workshops were organised in Kyiv and Odesa in March 2025, with a senior UNITAD expert presenting investigative and prosecutorial techniques applied in cases concerning crimes against cultural heritage committed by ISIL/Da'esh in Iraq. Overall, during the reporting period, EUAM Ukraine delivered training activities in Kyiv, Lviv and Odesa for approximately 80 investigators and prosecutors from the National Police of Ukraine, the Security Service of Ukraine and the Office of the Prosecutor General.

In mid-May 2025, EUAM Ukraine initiated cooperation with the Culture Resilience Informatics and Analysis Lab (CURIA), focusing on the reclassification of Ukrainian cultural heritage objects by Russian authorities in temporarily occupied territories. The Mission also engaged with the Ministry of Culture and Strategic Communications, including discussions with both Deputy Ministers on the development of national lists of cultural heritage objects and of stolen or missing cultural property. Building on these exchanges, EUAM Ukraine organised a round table on domestic art police units in September 2025, drawing on EU best practices. The organisation of the round table and the subsequent liaison with EU and international specialised law enforcement authorities were supported by a visiting expert from the Netherlands Police Specialised Art Crime Unit, whose expertise facilitated practical exchanges and strengthened operational links with specialised EU law enforcement units. The event effectively opened the ground for enhanced cooperation in the field of cultural heritage protection and related criminal investigations.

Despite tangible progress, structural challenges remain. Although a specialised prosecutorial unit on crimes affecting cultural heritage was established within the Office of the Prosecutor General in May 2024, further capacity-building is required, particularly with regard to specialised investigative techniques such as OSINT and geospatial evidence. In addition, the recommendation stemming from the 2023 Lviv conference to establish an interdepartmental working group dedicated to the protection of Ukraine's cultural heritage has not yet been implemented.

Looking ahead, EUAM Ukraine plans to continue and deepen its engagement through specialised advice, targeted workshops and advanced training on international crimes against cultural heritage, relevant international case law and best practices. These efforts will be pursued in close cooperation with the Office of the Prosecutor General, Pravo-Justice, CURIA and key international partners, with a view to strengthening accountability, coordination and resilience in the protection of Ukraine's cultural heritage in the context of the ongoing conflict.

**European Union Border Assistance Mission in Libya (EUBAM Libya)**

EUBAM Libya has been actively engaged in the protection and management of cultural heritage within the context of its broader mandate for peace and security in the region. During the reporting period the mission has headed several initiatives aimed at curtailing the illicit import, export, and trafficking of cultural heritage, an area of significant concern given the historical richness and diversity of Libya's cultural assets.

The mission has embedded cultural heritage protection within its strategic plans, as reflected in the Operation Plan and Mission Implementation Plan. It aligns with the EEAS policy framework, underscoring the importance of cultural heritage preservation in fostering peace and security.

EUBAM Libya has conducted specialized training for key national bodies, including the Libyan Customs Administration, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of Defence. These sessions, held in April 2025, were tailored to enhance capabilities in combating heritage trafficking and included areas such as international cooperation and connections between cultural heritage crimes and terrorism financing.

Recognizing the host country's needs for stronger legislative and operational frameworks, EUBAM Libya has pinpointed areas requiring additional support, notably within the Tourism Police and Antiquities Protection Agency. By addressing these capacity gaps, the mission aims to bolster Libya's defense against the exploitation of its cultural heritage.

In terms of policy measures, Libya's efforts are primarily guided by its Antiquities Law No. 3 of 1995, supplemented by international collaborations. EUBAM Libya interacts with various international and regional organizations, such as UNODC, EUROPOL, and UNDP, forging a cooperative approach to enhance the impact of cultural heritage protection measures while avoiding overlaps with other missions. Challenges remain in optimizing interaction with these entities; however, the mission continues to advocate for synergy and complementary activities, particularly concerning border management and crime prevention.

Through its activities, EUBAM Libya has laid the groundwork for more efforts related to cultural heritage protection. Future plans include expanding training endeavours and cultivating local expertise, thereby empowering Libyan entities to engage effectively with European counterparts on heritage-related projects. This strategic focus not only contributes to the preservation of Libya's heritage but also strengthens the country's resilience against the destabilizing effects of cultural asset exploitation.

**European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) in Kosovo**

Cultural heritage protection constitutes an important conflict-prevention and confidence-building tool in Kosovo and is embedded as a cross-cutting theme in EULEX's Operational Plan. It is mainstreamed across both Lines of Operation – Monitoring and Advising, and Operations Support – and forms part of the Mission Implementation Plan, which, in line with the Civilian CSDP Compact, places increased focus on security challenges linked to the

preservation and protection of cultural and religious heritage. As Kosovo's second security responder, EULEX's engagement in CHP contributes directly to its mission to support the maintenance and promotion of public order and security, while also assisting Kosovo's rule of law institutions in becoming more multi-ethnic and aligned with international human rights standards and European best practices.

Given that cultural heritage in Kosovo is frequently intertwined with fragile inter-ethnic relations, contested historical narratives, and levels of public trust in institutions, EULEX's robust monitoring mandate enables the Mission to actively engage in cases of sensitive inter-ethnic nature or those involving human rights aspects. Up until 2018, EULEX held an executive mandate that allowed for strong operational engagement in CHP, including support to the establishment of the Kosovo Police Religious and Cultural Heritage Unit and the direct handling of hate crimes and attacks against religious or cultural heritage. Following the significant reduction of this executive mandate in 2018, the Mission continued to robustly monitor CHP-related cases, while a more proactive and preventive approach emerged after the adoption of the 2021 Council Conclusions on Cultural Heritage in Conflicts and Crises and was further reinforced by the Civilian CSDP Compact of May 2023

During the reporting period, this renewed approach translated into close monitoring of several sensitive legal cases related to cultural heritage, enhanced outreach to key guardians of – at times contested – heritage sites, increased patrolling of cultural and religious heritage locations, and systematic attention to emerging trends of cultural appropriation with potential security implications. Kosovo's legal framework for cultural heritage protection is relatively advanced and clearly establishes Special Protective Zones (SPZs), primarily around Serbian Orthodox cultural heritage sites. Nevertheless, repeated attempts by authorities or private individuals to re-label or appropriate this heritage as Catholic, Paleochristian, "Kosovo Orthodox," or Albanian/Illyrian have generated tensions. EULEX has sought to contain these risks through close engagement with the Serbian Orthodox Church, the judiciary, and responsible law-enforcement bodies, while consistently stressing the importance of the rule of law and the potential of cultural heritage to serve as a bridge rather than a barrier between communities

Trust-building and mediation have played a central role in this engagement. Notably, in November 2024 the EULEX Head of Mission facilitated and hosted a first-ever direct meeting between the Bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Kosovo Police General Director, and the Minister of Internal Affairs, marking an important confidence-building milestone. In parallel, EULEX repeatedly highlighted a long-standing landmark case involving the non-implementation of a 2016 Constitutional Court ruling concerning land within an SPZ assigned to the Serbian Orthodox Church. While progress was limited for several years, sustained advocacy and Mission support helped overcome remaining bureaucratic obstacles, contributing to the successful resolution of the case in early 2024

Overall, while physical threats to cultural heritage in Kosovo – such as looting or illegal excavations – remain rare, the main challenges to CHP are ethno-political, social, and economic in nature. EULEX's engagement therefore focuses on mitigating inter-ethnic tensions, preventing the instrumentalisation of cultural heritage, and reinforcing the rule of law as a stabilising factor, thereby helping transform cultural heritage from a potential conflict driver into a resource for peace, social cohesion, and long-term stability.

## European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia

The protection and monitoring of cultural heritage constitute a relevant area of engagement for EUMM Georgia and are embedded in the Mission's strategic framework, notably the Human Rights Action Plan 2023–2024. Cultural heritage considerations are integrated into key operational documents, including the OPLAN, where they are recognised as contributing to stabilisation and normalisation efforts.

The Mission collects and assesses information through a combination of patrol observations, structured dialogue with local communities, and the analysis of satellite imagery. These complementary methods enable a comprehensive monitoring of cultural heritage sites and related risks. Operationally, EUMM Georgia maintains and strengthens cooperation with local, national, and international actors involved in cultural heritage protection. A network of Cultural Heritage Focal Points has been established across all field offices, supporting capacity-building efforts and ensuring the systematic mainstreaming of cultural heritage issues into mission activities. This approach is further underpinned by internal guidance, including the Mission Information Collection Plan and dedicated Terms of Reference for Cultural Heritage Focal Points.

Human security patrols regularly monitor culturally significant sites along the Administrative Boundary Lines (ABLs), with particular attention to cemeteries, churches, and other places of religious and cultural importance. Monitoring focuses on the impact of conflict-related dynamics, including movement restrictions, on access to and preservation of these sites.

Access constraints to the occupied regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain a major challenge. As a result, monitoring in these areas relies predominantly on open-source information, satellite imagery, and cooperation with Tbilisi-based stakeholders. Key concerns include unauthorised restoration works, neglect and deterioration of heritage sites, as well as the construction of military or security-related infrastructure in their vicinity.

EUMM Georgia also supports cultural heritage-related initiatives through its Confidence Building Facility (CBF), aiming to promote dialogue and trust between communities separated by the ABLs. Cultural heritage projects under the CBF have demonstrated tangible confidence-building potential, although their further development is contingent on the approval of increased funding. All initiatives are implemented in line with a strict “do no harm” principle and in coordination with other EU actions to avoid duplication.

The Mission actively advocates for the enjoyment of cultural heritage-related rights, including freedom of movement during major religious events such as Orthodox Easter and Lomisoba. These issues are raised through established dialogue mechanisms, notably the Geneva International Discussions (GID) and the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM), with positive outcomes recorded in recent years.

Persistent challenges include limited financial resources and specialised expertise in cultural heritage protection, compounded by the sensitive political context in the conflict-affected areas. Legislative amendments adopted in 2024 to Georgia's Cultural Heritage Law and the Code on

Spatial Planning of Architectural and Construction Activities represent positive developments. However, engagement with the Ministry of Culture during the reporting period has been limited and would benefit from further strengthening.

Looking ahead, EUMM Georgia stands ready to enhance cooperation with local actors, including civil society organisations, and EU counterparts to support initiatives aimed at improving the protection, monitoring, and promotion of cultural heritage across the region.

### **European Union Mission in Armenia (EUMA)**

Cultural heritage holds significant importance for both Armenia and Azerbaijan, making it a highly sensitive topic. The International Court of Justice in 2021 mandated Azerbaijan to take all necessary actions to prevent and punish vandalism and desecration affecting Armenian cultural heritage. The preservation of cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh has become a growing concern following the displacement of people from the area. Armenia has committed to focusing its resources on preserving the culture and traditions of the Nagorno-Karabakh population, as well as taking necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding, development, and promotion of their intangible cultural heritage.

During human security patrols, mission monitors have observed Azeri cemeteries that have either been destroyed or vandalized, though the timing of these incidents is unclear. Conversely, they have also identified cemeteries that are well-maintained.

The Armenian government has implemented a strategy for the years 2023-2027 aimed at preserving, developing, and popularizing Armenia's cultural heritage.

While the mission's primary function is observational, its activities could significantly contribute to highlighting issues and facilitating dialogue to influence cultural heritage preservation efforts in the region.

As part of its Human Security patrolling activities, the Mission gathers information on old Armenian cemeteries, churches, and older fortresses and medieval structures, which are saved in a Mission database for possible future use.

**Annex 2: EU-SUPPORTED PROJECTS RELATED TO CULTURAL HERITAGE (BY REGION)**

In **Europe**, projects to protect cultural heritage have been developed in the Western Balkans region, the Eastern Partnership countries, Ukraine included, and in countries covered by the Creative Europe Program.

- Countries Participating in Creative Europe Program<sup>39</sup>

*READY – Resilience for Heritage in the Face of Disasters, Climate Risks and Complex Emergencies* (December 2024 – October 2027), budget: EUR 1.5 million (Creative Europe funding), Implementing partner: ICCROM. This is a pan-European capacity-building initiative designed to strengthen the ability of heritage professionals and institutions to prevent, prepare for, and respond to disasters, climate change impacts, and complex emergencies affecting cultural heritage. The project combines training, field projects, and network-building to promote resilience, cross-sector cooperation, and disaster risk management, while integrating heritage into broader climate adaptation and crisis response frameworks.

- South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) and Moldova

*EU4Dialogue* (2021-2025), budget: EUR 15 million (ENI), implementing partners: United Nations Development Programme, DAAD, Goethe-Institut, CAMPUS France and Latvian National Library. The project aims to facilitate exchange through education and culture across divides. This includes exploring opportunities to increase the use of cultural heritage sites and cultural spaces for confidence building through activities such as study visits to EU countries, webinars, workshops and in-person events for cultural heritage professionals.

Additionally, Armenia and Georgia are associated to Creative Europe, the EU's flagship programme to support the cultural and creative sectors, under which entities or individuals from both countries participated in EU-funded projects related to cultural heritage.

- Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia)

*Fighting against the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property in the Western Balkans* (2020 – 2025), budget EUR 2.8 million (NDICI, DG EAC and DG NEAR), implemented by UNESCO.

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<sup>39</sup> Under the Creative Europe Programme, third countries beyond EU Member States may participate on the basis of specific agreements with the EU, financial contributions, and compliance with programme rules; however, their participation is differentiated, with some countries (such as EEA/EFTA and certain enlargement countries) enjoying full access to all strands, while others, particularly in the European Neighbourhood, are limited to partial participation in selected strands, meaning that access to funding opportunities varies and remains subject to evolving political and technical arrangements.  
[https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/crea/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation\\_crea\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/crea/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_crea_en.pdf)

The project had the primary objective of creating stronger coordination among key actors at regional and international level. In line with the EU Western Balkans Strategy, the overall objective of the project was to foster regional cooperation, reconciliation and good neighbourly relations through heritage and culture, as essential preconditions for the progress on a European path and notably fostering the alignment of national legal frameworks with the EU acquis. In particular, the project aimed to promote dialogue, mutual respect, trust and cross-cultural understanding among communities, contributing to an enabling environment for reconciliation, stability and sustainable development. This was pursued by means of reinforcing the protection of cultural heritage and diversity, and by strengthening the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property through capacity-building and awareness-raising activities, alongside with the enhancement of regional coordination. The action also included two components dedicated, respectively, to improving the security of cultural heritage sites and buildings, and to providing technical assistance and advice to review and improve the relevant legal and policy frameworks at national level. In addition, the project built upon and contributed to further dissemination of the learning materials jointly developed by the EU and UNESCO, by producing editions in local languages of “Fighting the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property. A Toolkit for European Judiciary and Law Enforcement”.

*Regional programme to support culture and creativity in the Western Balkans (2022 – 2026)*, budget: EUR 8 million (IPA II), implementing partners: UNESCO, Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo and British Council. The project aims to foster reconciliation and good neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans through culture. It promotes intercultural dialogue and increases the socio-economic impact of the cultural and creative sector in the Western Balkans. It takes a multi-sectorial approach, targeting public authorities, the private sector and civil society organisations in culture. The project aims to: (i) improve the performance of the cultural and creative sector in the Western Balkans; (ii) strengthen cultural cooperation within and with the Western Balkans; and (iii) enhance inclusive cultural heritage for local development by supporting cultural policies, strengthening partnerships fostering regional cooperation, and promoting heritage and mobility in the creative sector.

- Albania

*EU4Culture* (October 2020 – July 2026), budget: EUR 40 million (IPA), implementing partner: UNOPS. The EU4Culture programme addresses the effects of the 2019 earthquake on Albania’s cultural heritage by revitalising affected cultural sites and monuments, contributing to socio-economic recovery and strengthening the tourism sector, which was further impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The action focuses on three main outputs: rehabilitation of damaged heritage sites; support for local economic development; and enhancement of the Ministry of Culture’s capacities in safeguarding, managing and promoting cultural heritage. It also seeks to increase public awareness of the value of Albania’s cultural heritage.

*EU for Economic Development – Tourism-led Local Economic Development with focus on Cultural Heritage* (February 2019 – February 2028), budget: EUR 6 million (IPA), implementing partner: Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo (AICS). The project aims to enhance and preserve the usability and attractiveness of cultural heritage assets at the Byllis archaeological site. It focuses on the preservation and restoration of Byllis' cultural heritage, improving accessibility, sustainability and community participation. The action strengthens local economic development through the adoption of the EU's Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) approach, capacity building, and reinforced cooperation between local communities and the park administration.

Additionally, Albania is associated to Creative Europe, the EU's flagship programme to support the cultural and creative sectors, under which entities or individuals from the country participated in projects related to cultural heritage.

- Bosnia and Herzegovina

*Harnessing culture and creativity for sustainable development in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (December 2025 – December 2028), budget: EUR 8.5 million (IPA 2024), implementing partner: UNESCO. The project aims to enhance the socio-economic impact of the cultural and creative sectors by strengthening capacities for cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and sustainable development. It supports cultural heritage protection, promotes intercultural cooperation, and strengthens the role of museums in reconciliation and community development. The action includes the construction of the Ars Aevi Museum of Contemporary Art Sarajevo, establishment of the Culture and Creative Industries Development Centre in Banja Luka, development of the Sarajevo Holocaust Museum nucleus, rehabilitation of Mujaga Komadina House in Mostar as a regional youth cultural hub, and reconstruction of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Republika Srpska to promote young creatives.

*Protection of Cultural Heritage in BiH by CSOs Networks – PCH Programme* (February 2024 – January 2027), budget: EUR 600,000 (EU4CS), implementing partner: Citizen's Association "NEŠTO VIŠE". The action strengthens participatory democracy by improving cooperation between civil society organisations and cultural institutions in cultural heritage protection. It seeks to halt ongoing heritage degradation through structured collaboration, clearer definition of CSO roles in safeguarding tangible heritage, and stronger advocacy for transparent and inclusive protection processes.

Additionally, Bosnia and Herzegovina is associated to Creative Europe, the EU's flagship programme to support the cultural and creative sectors, under which entities from the country participated in projects related to cultural heritage.

- Georgia

*Creative Compass Georgia* (October 2023 – November 2028), budget: EUR 4.65 million (NDICI), implementing partner: Goethe-Institut Georgien. This project strengthens sustainable growth and employment in Georgia's cultural and creative industries, with a focus on municipalities outside Tbilisi. It provides diverse funding mechanisms, capacity-building, creation of creative spaces, networking and knowledge exchange. The initiative awarded mapping grants to 35 municipalities and distributed 59 sub-grants nationwide, contributing significantly to sector development and visibility.

*Supporting Georgia's Participation in the Creative Europe Programme – Phase II* (April 2023 – April 2027), budget: EUR 350,000 (NDICI), implementing partner: Ministry of Culture of Georgia. The action supports Georgia's participation in Creative Europe by co-financing the membership fee. It increased awareness of the programme, boosted the number of Georgian project proposals and strengthened engagement with European cultural networks.

Additionally, Georgia is associated to Creative Europe, the EU's flagship programme to support the cultural and creative sectors, under which entities or individuals from the country participated in projects related to cultural heritage.

- Kosovo<sup>40</sup>

*Cultural Heritage as a Driver for Economic Revival of Janjevë/Janjevo* (December 2021 – December 2024), budget: EUR 3.4 million (EU contribution: EUR 2 million, IPA II), implementing partners: Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, and United Nations Development Programme Kosovo. The project aims to use cultural heritage to stimulate socio-economic growth in the region, integrating tangible, natural and intangible heritage assets. Key achievements in 2023 include completing emergency consolidation work on nine houses and finalising restoration work on four others.

*European Archaeological Mission in Kosovo: from Ulpiana to Iustiniana Secunda* (December 2021-December 2024), budget: EUR 1 million (IPA II), implementing partner: École Normale Supérieure (ENS) – Paris Sciences et Lettres University. The project aims to increase the visibility of archaeological heritage and develop tourism potential in Kosovo's rural communities, building on the remarkable findings like the Latin dedication by Emperor Justinian and Theodora at Ulpiana. This EU-funded initiative, which includes the unearthing of a significant episcopal basilica, contributes to advancing scientific expertise in treating, maintaining, and enhancing archaeological heritage. Led by international and local experts, the project not only deepens understanding of Kosovo's ancient history but also equips local institutions with modern archaeological tools and fosters collaboration between international experts and the Ministry of Culture.

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<sup>40</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Additionally, Kosovo is associated to Creative Europe, the EU's flagship programme to support the cultural and creative sectors, under which entities or individuals from Kosovo participated in at least one project related to cultural heritage.

- Moldova

*EU Support to Confidence Building Measures VI, Component 3 - Cultural Heritage*, (July 2023 – December 2025), budget: EUR 600 000 (NDICI), implementing partner: United Nations Development Programme. The sixth cycle of EU support to confidence-building measures (2023-2025) aims to continue fostering confidence between communities to help settle the Transnistrian conflict. A key component of this phase is support to cultural heritage conservation and restoration on both banks of the Nistru river.

- North Macedonia

*Strengthening the institutional capacities in dealing with cultural heritage and environmental crimes* (January 2024-October 2025), budget: EUR 1 million (IPA III), implementing partners: Italian Carabinieri and EUTALIA. This twinning project aims to strengthen North Macedonia's capacity to combat illicit trafficking of cultural property and environmental crimes. Working closely with the Ministry of Interior, the project focuses on enhancing prevention, investigation, and prosecution capabilities. It emphasizes practical, operational improvements and fosters international cooperation.

Additionally, North Macedonia is associated to Creative Europe, the EU's flagship programme to support the cultural and creative sectors, under which entities from the country participated in at least one project related to cultural heritage.

- Ukraine

*House of Europe II* (November 2022 – April 2026), budget: EUR 10 million (NDICI), implementing partner: Goethe-Institut. The project aims to build a more inclusive and resilient Ukrainian society by promoting professional exchanges and showcasing Ukrainian voices and cultural heritage. It improves the quality of work carried out by Ukrainian professionals, focusing on sustainability, minority rights, and cultural preservation. The project also increases awareness of EU programmes and supports civil society's resilience amid war-related challenges. Additionally, it fosters integration of national minorities, particularly the Jewish community, through dialogue and mutual understanding, while addressing key policy priorities such as digitalisation, media literacy, and ecological sustainability.

*Acting to Preserve Ukrainian Heritage II* (September 2023 – March 2025), budget: EUR 2 million (FPI), implementing partner: ALIPH Foundation. The specific objective of this project is to mitigate the impact of the war on Ukraine's cultural heritage. It focuses on protecting buildings and collections of museums, archives, libraries, monuments and sites, while also supporting cultural heritage professionals to ensure they can continue their work in Ukraine. The project is ongoing and continues to provide emergency support to Ukrainian cultural institutions, helping them manage and preserve their valuable heritage despite the challenges posed by the war.

*ReHERIT 2.0: Common Responsibility for Shared Heritage (December 2024 – December 2027)*, budget: EUR 2 million (NDICI), implementing partners: Center for Urban History and the Centre for Regional Development of the PPV Economic Development Agency. This project aims to raise awareness of the diversity, value, and potential of Ukraine's local multicultural heritage. It seeks to develop and pilot participatory approaches that make local cultural heritage more relevant and accessible to contemporary communities, while applying effective management practices and context-sensitive promotion strategies. ReHERIT 2.0 also focuses on strengthening the capacities of local stakeholders to manage, interpret, and activate multicultural heritage in a sustainable and inclusive manner.

Additionally, Ukraine is associated to Creative Europe, the EU's flagship programme to support the cultural and creative sectors, under which entities or individuals from the country participate regularly in calls published under the programme receiving EU funding for projects related to cultural heritage. In 2022 and again in 2024, two special calls were launched under Creative Europe to support Ukraine's cultural and creative sectors, under which the three following projects related to cultural heritage were supported among others.

*U-RE-HERIT: Architects for Heritage in Ukraine (May 2023-April 2026)*, budget: EUR 1 million (Creative Europe), implementing partners: Architects Association of Lithuania and a consortium of 11 organisations. Funding: Creative Europe. The U-RE-HERIT project focuses on post-war recovery of Ukraine's cultural sectors, emphasising cultural heritage. It creates a platform for collaboration among Ukrainian and European architects, urbanists and antiquarians to protect and develop Ukraine's urban and architectural heritage as a key aspect of sustainable recovery. The project tackles heritage evaluation, preservation and restoration, redefining national and local identities. Activities include workshops, seminars and public events to share knowledge, experiment with new approaches, and build expertise in heritage protection. Expected outcomes include research, guidelines, workshops and educational courses to support Ukraine's reconstruction and cultural preservation.

*UAxEU "UkrAinian cultural eXchange with European Union" (January 2026 – December 2028)*, budget: EUR 1 million (Creative Europe), implementing partners: the European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA) from the Netherlands with three other partners from Ukraine, one from Belgium and one other from the Netherlands. UAxEU is a project aiming at strengthening the resilience of Ukraine's cultural and creative sectors and industries in Ukraine, by fostering an interconnected Ukraine-EU community of solidarity, exchange, co-creation and care. Building on the strength of ELIA's unique UAx previous project (2022-2025), UAxEU shifts post-war recovery from unilateral support to a dynamic ecosystem where knowledge, skills, and resources enable capacity-building and inter-collegial networking. It will provide training and professional development for more than 450 artists and cultural professionals, mentorship for 90 emerging artists, and internships for 30 cultural workers and educators, aligning with the European Skills Agenda and preparations for EU integration. Key peer-learning events in Ukraine and the EU will feature networking sessions, panel discussions, focus groups, and learning opportunities. By placing arts and culture education at the heart of post-war recovery, UAxEU upholds both artistic and democratic values supporting people and institutions in Ukraine to rebuild from within. The project will also provide specialised training on risk assessment, emergency response, and sustainable preservation strategies for the

protection of cultural heritage. It will also define clear qualification requirements for specialists working in art restoration, architectural heritage conservation (wood, metal, plasterwork), and museum preservation – fields where Ukraine currently lacks formal qualification pathways. Based on these standards, UAxEU will develop two professional development certificate programmes as a non-formal offer in restoration and conservation and museum management.

*Culture Helps Solidarity (October 2025 – March 2028)*, budget: EUR 2 million (Creative Europe), implementing partners: Europese Culturele Stichting from the Netherlands with one German and two Ukrainian partners as a consortium. Funding: Creative Europe. The Culture Helps Solidarity project supports Ukrainian creative professionals in arts and cultural heritage, along with their European peers, enabling them to continue their vital role in fostering social engagement, integration, and cohesion among displaced Ukrainians. The initiative also addresses the critical situation of (female) war veterans while promoting cultural access for all Ukrainians, at home and abroad. Its specific objective are to implement an accessible, agile and multilayered European grant-scheme for Ukraine and peers in Creative Europe countries that (1) provides up to 100 creative professionals (and war veterans) working with displaced Ukrainians in the field of arts and cultural heritage personal care support to remain resilient and healthy; (2) finances at least 60 knowledge and capacity development projects for Ukrainian arts and cultural heritage initiatives in topical fields; (3) supports knowledge exchange, networking and the development of at least 30 tangible collaboration projects among 60 multipliers inside Ukraine and Creative Europe countries.

- Ukraine and Eastern Europe (Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia)

*Prevention, Research, Investigation and Security in Museums (PRISM)* (December 2024–December 2027), budget: EUR 822,456 (DG EAC), implementing partner: International Council of Museums (ICOM). The project aims to strengthen the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural goods by enhancing monitoring capacities and preventive measures to secure museum and documentary collections. It focuses on improving access to information and data, raising awareness, and developing practical tools to better document and protect diverse museum collections. The project targets seven countries with tailored national components reflecting specific needs and risk assessments. In addition, ICOM will update and further develop its Observatory on Illicit Traffic in Cultural Goods, contributing to improved data collection, analysis and knowledge-sharing at international level.

**In the Middle East and North Africa region:**

- Egypt

*Participatory Site Management at Qubbet el Hawa and Qubbet el Hawa North* (May 2024 – January 2027), Budget EUR 2.5 million (NDICI) implementing partner: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. The project enhances inclusive and sustainable management of the archaeological necropolis at Qubbet el Hawa and Qubbet el Hawa North. It improves site accessibility through targeted infrastructure works, supports cooperation between state authorities, scientific missions and civil society, and develops learning opportunities to strengthen cultural identity and community engagement.

The action coordinates closely with archaeological missions from the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation and the University of Jaén.

- Lebanon

*Restoring Lebanon's Heritage for an Engaged Community* (January 2024 – December 2027), budget: EUR 960,000 (NDICI-GEO-MENA), implementing partners: Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA), University of Balamand. The action's objective is to restore a heritage site affected by conflict and transform it into an inclusive public space that fosters dialogue and social cohesion. Activities include site mapping, restoration works, and community engagement involving youth and heritage professionals. Initial mapping and research on conflict-affected sites are underway, with technical collaboration launched with the Institut National du Patrimoine and the Directorate General of Antiquities in Lebanon.

*FANN: Fostering Arts, Narratives, and New Perspectives for Social Cohesion* (April 2025 – March 2028), budget: EUR 650,000 (NDICI-GEO-MENA), implementing partners: Brot für die Welt (lead) and the Arab Resource Center for Popular Arts (ARCPA). The project empowers youth and cultural actors across Lebanon through creative training, cultural events and public engagement activities aimed at strengthening social ties and promoting gender equality. It seeks to foster artistic expression and intercommunal dialogue, particularly in underserved areas. The action has launched its inception phase with expert recruitment and initial coordination meetings completed, and baseline assessments currently under way.

*Aiming to Support Individuals in Engaging in Theatre as a Form of Cross-Cultural Dialogue* (December 2023 – June 2025), budget: EUR 140 000 (NDICI-GEO-MENA), implementing partner: Association CREAL (Théâtre Monnot). The project promotes cross-cultural dialogue through theatre-based collaboration with European professionals, supports women affected by the Beirut blast and gender-based violence through expressive arts therapy, and provides a platform for emerging Lebanese theatre practitioners. Workshops and performances have connected affected women with theatre professionals, while mentoring activities have strengthened intercultural collaboration and artistic expression.

*Recovery of Housing and Culture & Creative Industries for Beirut* (February 2022 – June 2025), budget: USD 12.75 million (LFF pooled fund, NDICI-GEO-MENA), implementing partners: UN-Habitat (heritage rehabilitation) and UNESCO (cultural and creative industries recovery). The project rehabilitates heritage buildings damaged by the 2020 port explosion and revitalises Beirut's cultural and creative sectors through combined physical restoration and targeted support to cultural actors. By March 2025, hundreds of heritage buildings had been stabilised or rehabilitated and over one hundred cultural professionals had received grants and training. A final event in May 2025 showcased the project's achievements and contribution to Beirut's post-crisis recovery. The EU is the main donor to the Lebanon Financing Facility (LFF) pooled fund.

*Tech for Memory* (February 2025 – January 2028), budget: EUR 650 000 (NDICI-GEO-MENA), implementing partners: Samir Kassir Foundation (lead), Boghossian Foundation, Southern Lebanon Cultural Council, and UMAM Documentation & Research.

The project promotes inclusive dialogue, civic engagement and national identity by digitally preserving Lebanon's collective memory through art, archives, multimedia storytelling and geolocated heritage landmarks. It targets youth and broader audiences through cultural programming and digital tools. Key historical events have been identified through expert consultations and research; the first "Memory on Stage" performance has taken place; and outreach and preparatory sessions are ongoing, laying the foundations for expanded public engagement.

- Libya

*HERITAGE – Heritage, Education, Restoration and Inclusion for a Thriving Archaeological Generation* (1 February 2025 – 1 February 2028), budget: EUR 2.2 million (NDICI/2023), implementing partner: Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo (AICS). The project aims to establish a sustainable national framework for cultural heritage conservation in Libya. It focuses on developing a roadmap for the creation of a national Restoration School and on enhancing knowledge and practical capacities in conservation techniques among Libyan professionals and institutions.

*National Antiquities and Heritage Management Initiative (NAHMI)* (November 2024 – November 2026), budget: EUR 1.8 million (NDICI/2023), implementing partner: GOPA-PACE. The action's objective is to strengthen the capacity of Libyan authorities and local communities to protect, manage and safeguard Libya's national cultural heritage. Activities include training for law enforcement, site risk assessments, legal reform support and community engagement in heritage protection. Between December 2024 and February 2025, two training sessions were delivered to the Tourism Police in Tripoli on emergency evacuation procedures and on cultural property protection and crisis response. A risk assessment mission at the Cyrene archaeological site in April 2025 identified vulnerabilities, equipment needs and training gaps. The project supported the Department of Antiquities in establishing a national committee for cultural heritage law reform, which meets weekly to prepare draft recommendations. Cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism led to the delivery of a tourist guide training course in Tripoli in July 2025, with additional sessions planned in Sebha. Work also began on an economic opportunities assessment around key heritage sites including Leptis Magna, Cyrene and Ghadamès.

*Building Libya's National Capacity to Prevent and Combat Corruption and Money Laundering* (July 2020 – July 2024), budget: EUR 2.5 million (Special Measures 2019), implementing partners: UNICRI and UNODC. The project enhances Libya's ability to respond to corruption and illicit financial flows, and to trace, freeze, seize and recover assets linked to criminal activities. One component supports the identification and recovery of cultural assets in foreign jurisdictions, in coordination with the Libyan Asset Recovery and Management Office (LARMO). The project has contributed to the recovery of significant Libyan assets, including twenty-one properties abroad and cultural assets worth approximately USD 20 million. UNICRI continues to provide technical advice to LARMO on sensitive, ongoing cases. Alongside asset recovery, the project strengthens institutional capacities to detect and address corruption and raises public awareness. Key national counterparts include LARMO, the Ministry of Justice, the Audit Bureau, the Central Bank of Libya, the Ministry of Finance, the Anti-Corruption Authority and several civil society organisations.

*Strengthening Local Capacity for Resilience and Recovery – Phase 3 (SLCRR Top-Up)* (December 2022 – November 2024), budget: EUR 192,000 (EUTF), implementing partner: UNDP. The project supports the rehabilitation of the historic Al-Akhyar Palace (Historical Castle) as part of broader efforts to reinforce local resilience and cultural recovery. Works include a full architectural survey and restoration of the building, following UNESCO restoration guidelines, to recover its original structure and ensure its long-term preservation. Once rehabilitated, the castle serves as a venue for social cohesion events and vocational training activities implemented by the municipality and civil society organisations. The Libyan Department of Antiquities oversees archaeological and historical sites and supervises the restoration process through its network of regional monitoring offices.

- Kuwait

*Restoring our Past, Preserving our Future: Protecting Cultural Heritage at Risk Exhibition* (22 May 2024 – 8 June 2024), budget: funded by ALIPH foundation, EUDEL human and material resources, implementing partners: ALIPH, Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyya, Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters. The action's objective is to showcase ALIPH-supported efforts, with EU coordination, in protecting and restoring cultural heritage in conflict-affected countries including Palestine, Yemen, Sudan, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Mali, and Niger. Activities included curating and hosting an exhibition, media promotion, and advocacy for the universal respect of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. The project also aimed to encourage Kuwait to re-engage as an active member of ALIPH and strengthen local and regional cultural heritage protection networks.

*#TeamEurope Visit to Failaka Island* (May 2025), budget: EUR 3,199.07 (EUDEL PPI), implementing partners: French Embassy, CEFREPA, EUNIC Cluster, Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters. The action's objective is to highlight the work of EU Member State archaeological missions in preserving and uncovering Failaka Island's rich heritage. Activities included an organized visit by Team Europe representatives, production of audiovisual materials (video and photography) for visibility purposes, and promotion of Failaka's archaeological and cultural significance.

*1<sup>st</sup> EU-Kuwait Culture Forum* (May 2025), budget: EUR 10,005.48 (FPI – “EU-GCC Outreach Facility”), implementing partner: Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters. The action's objective is to discuss and showcase long-standing collaboration between EU Member States and Kuwait in preserving and promoting cultural heritage. Activities included panel discussions, presentations on EU-Kuwait cultural cooperation, and media visibility initiatives, coinciding with Kuwait's designation as Arab Capital of Culture in 2025. The forum positioned the EU as a strategic cultural partner for Kuwait.

*“Join Us to Discover the European Cultural Footprint in Kuwait” Video Campaign* (April – May 2025), budget: EUR 1 736 (EUDEL PPI), implementing partners: EU Member State embassies. The action's objective is to promote EU-Kuwait cultural connections, emphasising European contributions to Kuwait's architectural landscape and cultural heritage. Activities

included production and dissemination of a digital video campaign targeting the public and cultural stakeholders, timed with Kuwait's Arab Capital of Culture 2025 celebrations.

- The Occupied Palestinian Territory

*Preserving endangered traditional crafts and enhancing employability in the creative sector in Palestine* (August 2024 – July 2026), Budget EUR 700 000 (NDICI), Implementing Partner: UNESCO. The project aims to contribute to enhancing the employability of young professionals and students through advancing the value chain components of 6 endangered crafts and creating synergies between creative design and crafts production. Through this project, the targeted crafts will be safeguarded through documentation and inventorying of related traditional know-how, and the targeted beneficiaries and institutions will have a better understanding of the creativity dynamics as they will be equipped with the necessary skills to explore the diverse arenas to advance crafts productions. Capacity-building trainings, workshops, professional and student exchanges, competitions, and sub-grants will be offered to help preserve and advance traditional and contemporary local creative industries.

In **Asia**, the EU has been implementing projects in:

- Central Asia and the Eastern Neighbourhood

*Cultural Heritage as a Vector for Peace, Stability, and Conflict Prevention in Central Asia and the Eastern Neighbourhood* (December 2024 – December 2028), budget: EUR 2 million (NDICI-FPI), implementing partner: ALIPH. The project aims to protect cultural heritage in crisis-affected regions, notably Central Asia and Eastern Neighbourhood, including Ukraine, with the intention to use cultural heritage as a tool for peacebuilding, stability, and conflict prevention. ALIPH provides demand-driven grant support to heritage sites and institutions, focusing on financing priority needs to directly protect heritage at risk. Multilateral coordination ensures non-duplication of aid and maximises the efficiency of interventions. Communication and visibility efforts are tailored to be conflict-sensitive, showcasing high-level achievements connected to heritage protection with the support of the EU. Strategic partnerships and local engagement drive the sustainability of actions, contributing to local economic and social development.

- Indonesia and Timor-Leste

*Strengthening Social Cohesion through Culture-Based Peacebuilding* (February 2023 – July 2025), budget: EUR 1 million (FPI), implementing partners: ChildFund International (Indonesia) and ChildFund Timor-Leste with local CSOs. The project reinforces youth-led peacebuilding through culturally embedded practices in Lampung and Liquiçá. In 2024, it exceeded targets, with 156 schools in South Lampung adopting the Peace Education Module inspired by traditional cultural values.

- Philippines

*Civil society, women and youth promoting culture of peace in Mindanao* (February 2023-January 2026), budget: EUR 1 million (MIP), implementing partners: CARE Nederland (lead coordinator), Oxfam Pilipinas, Community Organizers Multiversity, Inc., Assistance and Cooperation for Community Resilience and Development, Inc., and Nisa Ul Haqq fi Bangsamoro Inc. The overall objective of the project is to help reduce drivers of chronic conflict and violence in Moro and Lumad communities, by strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations and groups of young people and women in Mindanao through: (i) gender-sensitive and inclusive cultural peacebuilding measures and partnerships; (ii) documentation of positive peace narratives and preservation of cultural peacebuilding expressions and practices within community structures and in advocacy spaces; and (iii) improved understanding and recognition of conflict drivers and injustices among conflict-affected Moro and Lumad communities by contextualising peace education in formal and non-formal education curricula.

#### In Sub-Saharan Africa:

- Chad

*Programme d'appui à la gestion concertée des aires protégées et écosystèmes fragiles du Tchad (APEF)* (2017 – 2026), budget: EUR 34.7 million (EU contribution: EUR 33 million, EDF), implementing partners: African Parks Network (APN), SOS Sahel International France and Union Internationale pour la Conservation de la Nature. Among the objectives of the project are promoting local culture through local crafts and valorising historical heritage. A scientific department of archaeology set up within the Natural and Cultural Reserve of Ennedi has inventoried a total of 343 registered archaeological sites. Most sites listed have a very poor conservation status. The best-preserved sites are rock art sites located in caves or sheltered by overhanging rock in areas that are difficult to access.

- Gambia

*Her Map Gambia* (September 2020-August 2024), budget: EUR 500 000 (FED), implementing partner: Initiative for Heritage Conservation. The goal of the project is to strengthen civil society organisations as partners and stakeholders in promoting social development and inclusive and sustainable growth in the cultural and creative industries. It also aims to develop the business skills of heritage and cultural managers to achieve greater community solidarity and reduce irregular migration. The project provided training on cultural heritage management to decision-makers, employees, tourism professionals and trainers, public opinion leaders, and public authority representatives in all six local government areas of The Gambia outside Greater Banjul (100 people).

- Mali

*Djigui#(Espoir) – Promotion d'une culture malienne engagée, levier de développement des territoires vulnérables* (December 2022 – May 2026), budget: EUR 177 000 (ACP-UE), implementing partners: Seed, and Street Movie. The project promotes culture as a driver of social, societal and economic development, with the overall objective of strengthening the

creative industries in precarious neighbourhoods by supporting younger Malians in their role as catalysts for change. It has three main goals: (i) to increase the value of young people as creators of cultural and social innovations, and to support their integration into a network committed to the development of Malian territories; (ii) to help young women access formal and informal creative industries and activities, and to enable their economic and social emancipation; and (iii) to support the emergence of a local cultural dynamic promoting public dialogue and collective expression, through access to culture.

*Brassage interculturel, artistique et sportif des jeunes des régions de Tombouctou et Taoudéni pour la paix et la cohésion sociale* (March 2023 – February 2026), budget: EUR 299 718 (NDICI), implementing partner: Association Festival vivre ensemble. The project aims to: (i) offer young people in the two regions a range of activities that promote the development of safe and neutral spaces for intercultural dialogue and capacity building by promoting active citizenship and inter-community relations; and (ii) demonstrate the importance of art and cultural values in social development for better living together by creating and disseminating live performances (such as theatre and music) produced by young people aimed at the community in its entirety.

*TANMINAKTE - Renforcer la cohésion sociale et le vivre ensemble par la promotion du patrimoine culturel immatériel de Tombouctou* (December 2022 – May 2026), budget: EUR 200 000 (NDICI), implementing partners: Association Malienne pour la Survie au Sahel and Association Festival vivre ensemble. The project aims to: (i) help young girls and boys use various forms of cultural expression to play an active role in promoting social cohesion; and (ii) increase the visibility and promotion of cultural initiatives that promote living together and dialogue between young people and adults, as a key to social transformation.

- Sudan<sup>41</sup>

*Afropolis Tungul: Urban biography of a cosmopolitan African capital* (January 2024 – May 2029), budget: EUR 2 million (Horizon Europe), implementing partner: Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw. The project aims to write an urban biography of Tungul (Old Dongola, Sudan), highlighting its medieval African heritage and conceptualising the city as a complex organism. This multidisciplinary project seeks to understand settlement persistence in riverine Africa, documenting Tungul's medieval and pre-modern city features. Analyses will cover urban design, structures, material culture, bioarchaeology, micromorphology and geochemistry. The findings will enrich Nubian datasets and offer new insights into urbanism and complex societies. Data collection will build on previous excavation results to consolidate all research conducted at Tungul.

- Tanzania

*Creative Youth for Social Cohesion* (2023 – 2026), budget: EUR 1.4 million (CSO), implementing partners: Goethe-Institut and CEDEA. The project aims to strengthen the role of culture in promoting human rights, artistic freedom, democratisation, good governance and

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<sup>41</sup> Projects will be implemented according to the current security framework.

more peaceful societies, by valorising the contribution of young people and culture to social cohesion at local level – in particular in the target areas of vocational education and recruitment of vocational education groups.

- Tanzania, Kenya and Mozambique

*Kujenga Amani: Building peace on the Swahili Coast* (April 2023 – March 2026), budget: EUR 4 million (IfSP), implementing partners: Comitato Europeo per la Formazione e l’Agricoltura, Agency for Peacebuilding, Associacao Mulher Lei E Desenvolvimento, Muslims Women Advancement of Rights and Protection, Sambasports Youth Agenda CBO, The Global Religions for Children Foundation Tanzania, WE WORLD, Conselho Nacioal Do Voluntario, Peace Change Intiative, Stretchers Youth Organisation, Tanzania 4H Organisation and Tanzania Building Future Organisation. The initiative focuses on four regions of the Swahili coast (Tanga and Mtwara regions in Tanzania; Mombasa and Kwale counties in Kenya; and Cabo Delgado province in Mozambique), the cradle of the Swahili culture, aiming to facilitate dialogue and peaceful cohabitation. The project will provide opportunities and safe spaces for dialogue among young people, religious and traditional leaders, media stakeholders, authorities and security providers. It explores peacebuilding efforts led by young people and promotes the Swahili creative arts as a way to reduce the potential for conflict between groups, while revitalising the traditional bonds of solidarity between the populations of the Swahili coast.

In **Central and South America**, the EU has been implementing projects in:

- Honduras

*Building Prosperous Futures for Living with Dignity* (February 2023 – January 2026), budget: EUR 2 041 250 (EU contribution EUR 1,530,250) (NDICI CSO 2022), implementing partner: Diakonia. The project strengthens the capacities of civil society organisations and advances cultural rights protection in vulnerable communities. It delivered 27 training sessions reaching over 800 participants, established six cultural observatories and reinforced 18 community organisations.

*Conserving the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve and Empowering the Miskito and Tawahka Peoples* (December 2024 – June 2027), budget: EUR 1 058 823 (EU contribution EUR 900 000) (NDICI HR), implementing partner: Fundación Ayuda en Acción. The action preserves the cultural and environmental heritage of the Río Plátano Biosphere while strengthening the human, territorial and economic rights of Indigenous communities.

*RESILIENT COMMUNITIES* (March 2023 – February 2026), budget: EUR 2 039 997 (EU contribution EUR 1 529 998) (NDICI CSO 2022), implementing partner: Associazione Progettomondo. The initiative promotes inclusive development and has contributed significantly to revitalising the cultural identity of the Chorotega people through community-led cultural actions.

*Defending the Right to Defend Land, Territory and Life in Conflict Areas* (March 2023 – February 2025), budget: EUR 733 334 (EU contribution EUR 550 000) (NDICI Human

Rights), implementing partner: Diakonia Sweden. The project strengthens the protection of Indigenous and Afro-Honduran cultural and territorial rights and builds local capacities to address socio-environmental conflicts.

*MOB – Creating Gender-transformative and Life-protecting Practices* (February 2023 – August 2025), budget: EUR 933,334 (EU contribution EUR 700,000) (NDICI Human Rights), implementing partner: Plan International Germany. The project supports Lenca and campesina women through training, advocacy and cultural resilience activities, reaching more than 1 100 participants and forming 68 community facilitators.

*Raitki Nani (“My Rights”)* (February 2023 – January 2025), budget: EUR 933 334 (EU contribution EUR 700 000) (NDICI Human Rights), implementing partner: Christian Aid Ireland. The action empowers Indigenous organisations of the Miskitu, Pech and Garifuna peoples to promote cultural, territorial and human rights in the Moskitia region.

- Panama

*Cultural Routes, Natural Crossroads* (November 2025 – September 2026), budget: EUR 50 000 (FPI), implementing partner: Cultural Relations Platform. The action’s objective is to foster intercultural dialogue and promote environmental and economic sustainability by exploring Panama–Europe cultural relations and the culture–climate nexus. Activities include an International Forum on Cultural Routes in the Americas focusing on the Panamanian experience, production of a Guidebook on the Routes, and the establishment of a network of experts. Additional activities comprise a youth literary competition, a field visit with the Youth Sounding Board and Team Europe Youth, a beach clean-up at a heritage site, an exhibition, and the alignment of the European Film Festival with the project theme.