



EU - UNESCO Information Meeting on Underwater Cultural Heritage

Underwater cultural heritage encompasses a vast legacy of millions of ancient shipwrecks, sunken cities, prehistoric sites and submerged landscapes. This heritage is scientifically increasingly significant. It holds not only information about the history of humankind and the social importance of the oceans but also about the history of climate change and its impact on humanity. At the High-level Conference of EU Ministers of Tourism, held in March 2014 in Athens, this submerged heritage has moreover been recognized as important for the diversification of coastal and maritime tourism, one of the priorities in current tourism development.

Today underwater cultural heritage is however endangered and still insufficiently protected, known and researched. Moreover, responsible adaptive reuse and public access needs facilitation to ensure that the opportunities underwater cultural heritage holds are seized.

To increase awareness of the topic and facilitate knowledge exchange among experts, researchers and decision makers, an **EU - UNESCO Information Meeting on Underwater Cultural Heritage** is organized and will be hosted at the **European Parliament**.

The **objectives of the meeting** are to provide information about latest trends in the protection, use and understanding of submerged archaeological sites, ranging from newest advances in 3D modelling of sites, new discoveries concerning historic climate change and submerged prehistory to the development of robot archaeologists able to dive in the deep sea.

The **European Commission** is committed to enhancing the protection of underwater cultural heritage and to supporting European 'Blue Growth' notably through various research and innovation initiatives, projects and calls for proposals, also aiming at promoting transnational thematic cultural routes. Recent EU-funded research projects in technology for location, assessment and management of underwater cultural heritage as well as in submerged prehistoric landscapes will be presented. Furthermore, future prospects in research and innovation in this area and the importance of Blue Growth will be discussed.

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, endeavors to improve the protection of this submerged heritage as well as to foster its research and raise awareness about it. Its work to protect cultural heritage is one of the most visible and successful international conservation initiatives.



The meeting will also inform about the UNESCO 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage and its legal and practical implications for EU Member States with a view to achieve ratification by all of them¹.

Representatives of UNESCO, representatives of European Commission Services as well as reputed heritage protection experts will be available for questions. The staff of DG Research and Innovation, DG Mare, DG EAC, DG GROW and other relevant DG of the EU Commission, as well as Members of the European Parliament, in particular members of the EU Culture and Education Committee and members of PECH Committee on Fisheries, are also invited to assist and to take part in the open discussion.

The **UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage** is the foremost international treaty concerning submerged heritage adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in 2001. It is the international community's response to the destruction of submerged archaeological sites by treasure-hunters and industrial activities. It reflects the growing recognition of the need to ensure the same protection to underwater heritage as that already accorded to land-based heritage. It provides legal protection, enables States Parties to adopt common approaches to preservation and provides effective professional guidelines on how to deal with and research underwater heritage.

The 2001 Convention entered into force on 2 January 2009. Today it has been ratified by 51 States. Many more States are currently preparing to join.

The Convention is strongly supported by underwater archaeologists, who actively apply and enforce its regulations. To put indeed a definitive end to the brutal treasure-hunting and industrial impact currently menacing major submerged archaeological sites the Convention needs however to be ratified universally.

To encourage the protection of underwater cultural heritage as well as the wider ratification and implementation of the UNESCO Convention, a partnership between UNESCO and the EU is being explored.

¹ EU Member State that are party to the UNESCO 2001 Convention are Bulgaria; Belgium, Croatia, France, Hungary, Italy; Lithuania; Portugal; Romania; Slovakia; Slovenia; Spain.. Of the candidate and potential candidate countries Montenegro, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina have ratified. EU Member States that have not yet ratified are Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Of the candidate countries, Serbia, FYR Macedonia and Turkey have not yet ratified.

Date and time: 1 October 2015, 11 am – 2 pm, sandwich lunch provided.

Venue: Room: A3G-2 Altiero Spinelli Building, European Parliament, Brussels

Chairperson: Ricardo SERRÃO SANTOS

Speakers: Ulrike Guerin (Secretariat of the 2001 Convention, UNESCO); Birgit de Boissezon (European Commission, DG RTD); Franz Lamplmair (European Commission, DG MARE); Benedetto Allotta (University of Florence, ARROWS project); David John Gregory (National Museum of Denmark, SASMAP project); Fritz Lüth (DAI, Germany, Splashcos project).

Contact: Jan Debisschop
UNESCO Liaison Office and Representation to the European Union
Tel: +32 2 290 89 63
Mob: +32 473 72 05 24
Fax: +32 2 290 89 69
UN House, 5th floor. 14, Rue Montoyer
1000 Brussels, Belgium
www.unesco.org/new/en/brussels
j.debisschop@unesco.org