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Plenary sitting

27.4.2015

B8-0389/2015

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

further to Questions for Oral Answer B8-0115/2015 and B8-0116/2015

pursuant to Rule 128(5) of the Rules of Procedure

on the destruction of cultural sites perpetrated by ISIS/Da'esh
(2015/2649(RSP))

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on behalf of the ECR Group

B8-0389/2015

European Parliament resolution on the destruction of cultural sites perpetrated by ISIS/Da'esh (2015/2649(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Council conclusions of 16 March 2015,
- having regard to United Nations Security Council resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2199 (2015),
- having regard to the 27 February 2015 statement by the President of the United Nations Security Council Liu Jieyi on the destruction of religious and cultural artefacts by ISIS/Da'esh,
- having regard to the statement of 9 March 2015 by the chair of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee Maria Böhmer and of 13 April 2015 by the UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova on the destruction of cultural sites by ISIS/Da'esh,
- having regard to Article 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to Council Regulation 116/2009 on the export of cultural goods,
- having regard to the Joint Communication of 6 February 2015 by the HR/VP and the Commission titled 'Elements for an EU regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the Da'esh threat',
- having regard to the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion and Belief of 1981,
- having regard to the EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief,
- having regard to the UN Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the Convention against Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the World Heritage Convention,
- having regard to the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects of 1995,
- having regard to Article 8, paragraph 2(b)(ix) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court,
- having regard to its previous resolutions on the situation in Iraq and Syria and on the ISIS/Da'esh threat,

- having regard to the United Nations’ #Unite4Heritage campaign,
 - having regard to the questions to the Council and to the Commission on the destruction of cultural sites perpetrated by ISIS/Da’esh (O-000031/2015 – B8-0115/2015 and O-000032/2015 – B8-0116/2015),
 - having regard to Rules 128(5) and 123(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the looting and destruction of priceless artefacts from ancient sites is rampant across the areas of Iraq and Syria under the control of ISIS/Da’esh forces; whereas some of the sites which have been targeted are listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites;
 - B. whereas the actions of ISIS/Da’esh militants threaten to upend millennia of coexistence in the Middle East and can be considered an example of cultural cleansing which risks the cultural and religious heritage of the region and the wider world;
 - C. whereas the advance of ISIS/Da’esh forces in Iraq and Syria led to the eviction of thousands of Christians and people from other religious and ethnic minorities from their ancestral homelands; whereas there were also reports of forced conversions;
 - D. whereas the forced evictions of members of a religious or ethnic group, and the destruction of cultural and religious sites and artefacts may be considered to be a war crime and/or a crime against humanity;
 - E. whereas ISIS/Da’esh is using the looting and sale of historic, cultural and religious artefacts to generate income which is used to support recruitment efforts and their ability to carry out future terrorist acts;
 - F. whereas despite international and European regulations banning the import of cultural goods emanating from Syria and Iraq, large numbers of stolen artefacts are still being illegally trafficked in Europe, assisted by organised crime networks;
 - G. whereas combatting the illegal trade of cultural and religious artefacts is not a specific competence of the European Union; whereas cooperation between Member States and third countries, using existing national and international legislation, is vital in tackling this trade;
 - H. whereas the lasting peace and stability of the region is critical in protecting religious, historic and cultural sites from further destruction and looting, and in order to preserve its ancient heritage;
 - I. whereas the European Union has proposed to devote EUR 1 billion to providing a substantial collective response to the implementation of the EU Regional Strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the ISIS/Da’esh threat;
 - J. whereas major international cultural organisations have formed the Heritage Task Force in conjunction with the Syrian Interim Government in order to help Syrians save their heritage from destruction;
 - K. whereas the civil war in Syria has also led to the destruction of some of the world’s

most important art, buildings and monuments, further threatening the cultural and religious heritage of the region;

1. Believes culture and heritage have the power to reconcile people, foster understanding and tolerance, and act as a key pillar in the promotion of peace;
2. Supports the position of UNESCO that cultural heritage is an important component of the cultural identity of communities, groups and individuals, and of social cohesion, and that its intentional destruction may have adverse consequences on human dignity and human rights;
3. Deplores the looting and destruction of ancient religious and cultural sites in Syria and Iraq by ISIS/Da'esh forces and other extremist groups;
4. Believes such acts of cultural cleansing are a deliberate and systematic attempt by extremists to erase the region's rich culture, history and traditions, including the centuries-old coexistence of religious and minority groups; believes moreover that such actions may undermine efforts to create sustainable peace and security in the region;
5. Accepts that the looting and destruction of historic sites and artefacts is not a new phenomenon, but nevertheless voices grave concern at the actions of ISIS/Da'esh extremists and its implications for the region, its people, and culture;
6. Expresses concern at the growing illegal trade in cultural and religious artefacts looted from sites controlled by ISIS/Da'esh in Iraq and Syria; further calls on the international community to work together, through the auspices of UNESCO, to prevent this trade and to safeguard the region's heritage;
7. Accepts that powers over the importation of goods, as well as customs and excise and related legislation, remains chiefly the competence of individual EU Member States and third countries, but nevertheless voices concern that the laws to prevent the import and sale of stolen artefacts in some countries are wholly inadequate to deal with the crisis;
8. Calls on the Council to agree a joint plan of action in order to put an end to the illegal trade in cultural property from the territories of Syria and Iraq and thereby prevent it from being used as a source of financing for terrorist activities;
9. Supports the aspirations of the various United Nations' conventions and international treaties aimed at protecting cultural and religious heritage;
10. Calls for the effective implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2199 and the adoption of legally binding measures to counter illicit trafficking of antiquities and cultural objects from Iraq and Syria;
11. Encourages more effective use of Interpol's Stolen Works of Art database in order to counter the illegal trade in cultural goods; praises moreover the efforts of national police forces such as the Metropolitan Police's Art and Antiques Unit in the United Kingdom, in tackling criminal activity in this area;

12. Believes greater information sharing and coordination between law enforcement agencies in Member States and third countries can play a significant role in identifying and prosecuting the criminal groups engaged in the illegal trade in artefacts looted from cultural sites;
13. Restates the importance of the respect for international law and human rights in seeking to repel the ISIS/Da'esh threat and bring sustainable peace and stability to the region;
14. Encourages coordinated international efforts to protect vulnerable cultural, historic and religious sites and artefacts from the threat of looting and destruction;
15. Reminds those countries neighbouring Syria and Iraq that they are in the frontline of stopping the illegal trade in artefacts looted from historic sites; reminds them in addition that the trade directly finances terrorism which threatens their own peace and security; believes the European Union, the League of Arab States and other international actors should consider helping those countries enhance capacity building in this area;
16. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the EEAS, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission, the parliaments and governments of the Member States, the Director General of UNESCO, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, the Government and Parliament of Iraq, and the Secretary General of the League of Arab States.