Markus J. Prutsch*

Heidelberg University (Historisches Seminar) Grabengasse 3-5 69117 Heidelberg, Germany

The European Parliament and the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018

Abstract: Starting with a brief account of the general importance ascribed to cultural heritage in European policy making and past initiatives in this field, this article examines the importance and actual role of the European Parliament in initiating and implementing the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018. It analyses the political reasoning and priorities of the European Parliament with regard to the Year, and concludes with some reflections on the ex-post evaluation of the Year's achievements and Parliament's future priorities pertaining to cultural heritage at the European political level.

Keywords: European Parliament, European Year of Cultural Heritage, European Union, cultural policy, cultural heritage

Cultural Heritage and European Policy Making**

"Cultural heritage" broadly understood has been a significant element of European policies since the very beginning of the "European project" at the end of the Second World War, and its promotion and protection has also become enshrined

^{*} **Markus J. Prutsch**, born in 1981, studied history and political science in Austria and Germany. Between 2006 and 2009, he was researcher at the European University Institute (Florence, Italy), where he received his Ph.D., specializing in 19th century political history and theory. In 2009, he was awarded with the Bruno-Kreisky-Prize for Political Literature. Between 2009 and 2012, he was a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Helsinki within the international research project Europe 1815-1914, funded by the European Research Council. He is senior researcher and administrator at the European Parliament (since 2011), fellow of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (since 2014), and associate professor at Heidelberg University (since 2019).

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in the European Treaties.¹ The importance ascribed by European political elites to "heritage" largely derives from its being seen as necessary for the emergence of a European sense of belonging that goes beyond economics and institutions; thus, as fundamental to the development of a supranational layer that transcends existing national collective identities.

Accordingly, generic notions of a "European heritage" that constitutes a common cultural space have been *the* traditional reference point in European political discourse on a collective European identity, in conjunction with the two World Wars (the horrors of which impelled European nations to redefine themselves in a supranational peace project designed to avoid similar paroxysms of radical nationalism in the future) and the European integration project itself (the historical achievements of which add to the legitimacy of the Union).

The significance of the notion of "European heritage" is clearly manifested, for example, in the Copenhagen Declaration on European Identity ("Copenhagen Declaration") adopted by the nine foreign ministers of the then-European Communities on 14 December 1973. This represents what is perhaps the most explicit statement of a common European identity from a European political body to date, standing out for its prescriptivism and the fact that it elucidates the principle of unity over that of diversity.² While the Declaration does acknowledge the "variety of national cultures" and the "dynamism of European identity", its emphasis is firmly on the cultural commonalities of the European nations, and their attachment to "common values and principles" (Articles 1 and 3) – representative democracy, the rule of law, social justice, and respect for human rights, all of which are considered "fundamental elements of the European Identity".³

The Copenhagen Declaration not only correlates "(cultural) heritage" and "identity", it also represents an early acknowledgement that heritage includes tangible *and* intangible elements alike, and that these elements are closely interlinked.

Besides the Copenhagen Declaration, more recent European activities which promote a shared cultural heritage as key to a sense of "Europeanness" include the

¹ See especially Article 3(3) of the Treaty on European Union, OJ C 202, 7.06.2016, p. 13 and Article 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, OJ C 202, 7.06.2016, p. 47.

² See: Declaration on European Identity (Copenhagen, 14 December 1973), Bulletin of the European Communities 1973, Vol. 12, pp. 118-122, http://www.cvce.eu/obj/declaration_on_european_identity_copenhagen_14_december_1973-en-02798dc9-9c69-4b7d-b2c9-f03a8db7da32.html [accessed: 28.03.2019]. Also see: A. Drace-Francis (ed.), European Identity: A Historical Reader, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2013, pp. 226-230. The Declaration expressed a clear commitment to an ever closer "United Europe", as expressed in its concluding Article 22: "The European identity will evolve as a function of the dynamic construction of a United Europe. In their external relations, the Nine propose progressively to undertake the definition of their identity in relation to other countries or groups of countries. They believe that in so doing they will strengthen their own cohesion and contribute to the framing of a genuinely European foreign policy. They are convinced that building up this policy will help them to tackle with confidence and realism further stages in the construction of a United Europe, thus making easier the proposed transformation of the whole complex of their relations into a European Union".

European Capital of Culture initiative (conceived in 1983 and formally launched in 1985), and the establishment of a European Union action for the European Heritage Label in November 2011,⁴ to name but two.⁵

The creation of the European Heritage Label – which, like the European Capital of Culture initiative, is predicated on the central idea of a common, albeit diverse, European heritage – can be seen as part of a more general trend towards exploiting the potential of cultural heritage for strengthening and safeguarding the process of European integration, following the failure of the ambitious "Constitution for Europe" in 2005.

In its wake, it was not just the programme Europe for Citizens that was launched, established by decision of the European Parliament and the Council in December 2006.⁶ Also culture and cultural heritage were being given increasing prominence at the EU level, as demonstrated by both the European Commission's adoption of a *European agenda for culture in a globalizing world* in 2007⁷ and the growing momentum behind the idea of a European Year dedicated to cultural heritage.

In response to the Commission communication of 22 July 2014 entitled Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe,⁸ the Council eventually made an explicit call for a "European Year of Cultural Heritage" in its Conclusions on participatory governance of cultural heritage, adopted on 25 November 2014,⁹ and invited the Commission to present a corresponding proposal.¹⁰

⁷ See: European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world, 10.05.2007, COM(2007) 242 final, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52007DC0242 [accessed: 28.03.2019].

⁴ See: Decision No. 1194/2011/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 November 2011 establishing a European Union action for the European Heritage Label, OJ L 303, 22.11.2011, pp. 1-9.

⁵ Another EU initiative explicitly dedicated to cultural heritage is, among others, the EU Prize for Cultural Heritage/Europa Nostra Awards (as of 2019 the European Heritage Awards/Europa Nostra Awards), which was launched in 2002 by the European Commission and has been organized by Europa Nostra ever since. Besides specially-tailored European instruments, cultural heritage is also supported through other means, for example the European Structural and Investment Funds.

⁶ Decision No. 1904/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 establishing for the period 2007 to 2013 the programme Europe for Citizens to promote active European citizenship, OJ L 378, 27.12.2006, pp. 32-40. The Europe for Citizens Programme was preceded by, *inter alia*, a detailed qualitative study funded by the European Commission and entitled *The Europeans*, *Culture and Cultural Values*. *Qualitative Study in 27 European Countries*. *Summary Report*, European Commission – Directorate-General for Education and Culture, Brussels 2006.

⁸ See: European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe, 22.07.2014, COM(2014) 477 final, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52014DC0477 [accessed: 28.03.2019].

⁹ See: Council conclusions on participatory governance of cultural heritage, OJ C 463, 23.12.2014, pp. 1-3.

¹⁰ Cf. Article 28: "Invites the Commission to [...] continue the dialogue with civil society organisations and platforms in cultural heritage-related policy areas and consider to present a proposal for a 'European Year of Cultural Heritage'".

Initiating and Implementing the EYCH – the Involvement of the European Parliament

Since its foundation, the European Parliament (EP) has actively advocated action to protect and promote Europe's rich cultural heritage, a living expression of which the EP, in its linguistic and cultural diversity, has always considered itself to be. An early example of this advocacy was the EP's 1974 resolution on measures to protect the European cultural heritage,¹¹ in which it expressed concern for the preservation of Europe's cultural heritage and stressed the need for proper funding and education in this regard; the resolution also pointed to legal and administrative barriers to the mobility of cultural heritage artefacts. Other examples include the resolution on the protection of European architectural and archaeological heritage, from September 1982,¹² and that on the conservation of such sites from October 1988.¹³

Given this longstanding commitment to European cultural heritage, it was not surprising that – after the Council's initial push in 2014 – the EP eagerly took up the idea of a European Year of Cultural Heritage (EYCH), becoming perhaps its most dedicated and vocal promoter in the years to follow.

In September 2015, the Parliament adopted a resolution entitled *Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe*, in support of the Council's call of November 2014.¹⁴ The resolution requested the Commission

to designate, preferably for 2018, a European Year of Cultural Heritage, with an adequate budget and with the aim, amongst other things, of disseminating and increasing awareness and education among future generations in respect of the values of the European cultural heritage and its protection, and to submit the draft programme for the European Year to Parliament no later than 2016.¹⁵

Particular emphasis was put on the "significance – in the light of what are profound demographic and societal changes – of our common European cultural heritage and of the planned European year with regard to citizens' identification with the European Union and to strengthening a sense of community within the Union".¹⁶

The joint push for a EYCH by both the Council and the EP, however, failed to obtain an immediate reaction from the European Commission. This inertia was proba-

¹¹ See: Resolution on the motion for a resolution submitted on behalf of the Liberal and Allies Group on measures to protect the European cultural heritage, OJ C 62, 30.05.1974, pp. 5-7.

 $^{^{12}}$ See: Resolution on the protection of the architectural and archaeological heritage, OJ C 267, 11.10.1982, pp. 25-29.

¹³ See: Resolution on the conservation of the Community's architectural and archaeological heritage, OJ C 309, 5.12.1988, pp. 423-427.

¹⁴ See: European Parliament resolution of 8 September 2015 towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe, OJ C 316, 22.09.2015, pp. 88-98.

¹⁵ Cf. Article 3(c).

¹⁶ Cf. Article 62.

bly due to a number of factors: mainly, perhaps, the fact that the Commission's political priorities lay elsewhere at the time (its Investment Plan for Europe, announced in late 2014, gave little space to cultural policies). Previous European Years had also proved somewhat sobering experiences, especially with regard to their success and wider impact. At the same time, ignorance of the potential of cultural heritage among the top leadership of the Commission was also undoubtedly a factor.

Faced with the Commission's lack of interest, and with no further legal instruments to compel it to act, the EP – actively supported by a number of Member States, including Germany, France, and Italy, as well as various civil-society organizations – intensified its canvassing and informal lobbying to try to persuade the Commission to pursue the idea of a EYCH in 2018. This was done at different levels, with the EP's Committee on Culture and Education, and later even EP-President Martin Schulz, taking a particularly active role.

These concerted efforts finally paid off when the Commission formally presented its Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a European Year of Cultural Heritage in late August 2016.¹⁷

Recognizing that "cultural heritage is of great value to European society from a cultural, environmental, social and economic point of view" and that "its sustainable management constitutes a strategic choice for the 21st century" (Recital 5), the Proposal designated 2018 as the European Year of Cultural Heritage as "an effective way of raising public awareness, disseminating information about good practices and promoting research and innovation as well as policy debate" (Recital 19). However, while thus meeting requests for a dedicated European Year and acknowledging cultural heritage as a central resource *and* political priority at European level, the Proposal fell short of the EP's expectations, especially in budgetary terms – the designated European Year was given no specific funding – but also as regards the overall framework of the EYCH, which was perceived as too "top-down".

At the same time, the Commission's belated proposal meant that prompt action was required, and an interinstitutional agreement had to be reached as soon as possible in order to provide legal certainty and allow sufficient time for adequate preparation of the EYCH. Faced with such a tight schedule, the responsible Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) decided to follow a simplified procedure provided for in the EP's Rules of Procedure, which accelerated parliamentary procedures and restricted individual Members' ability to table amendments. While the Commission's text was thus left largely untouched in order to expedite the process, in its report adopted in November 2016 (Rapporteur: Mircea Diaconu),¹⁸ the CULT

¹⁷ See: European Commission, Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a European Year of Cultural Heritage, 30.08.2016, COM(2016) 543 final, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2016:0543:FIN [accessed: 28.03.2019].

¹⁸ See: European Parliament, Report on the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a European Year of Cultural Heritage, 16.11.2016, A8-0340/2016, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A8-2016-0340+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN [accessed: 28.03.2019].

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Committee still focused on: 1) reinforcing the budgetary basis for the EYCH, and 2) strengthening the involvement of civil society. The report proposed a dedicated article within the general budget of the Union to support the EYCH, by making available "fresh money" not diverted from existing EU funding programmes, above all Creative Europe, with which to support a few transnational European flagship initiatives and to complement national, regional, and local funding sources for actions due to take place during the EYCH. In order to address the second of the EP's primary concerns, the report requested that "the structure of the European Year shall allow for the active participation of professional organisations operating in the field of cultural heritage, of existing transnational cultural networks and of interested NGOs and cultural associations and, in particular, of youth organisations".¹⁹

In the ensuing interinstitutional negotiations between the EP, the Council and the Commission, which were successfully completed in the spring of 2017, these efforts to add "horizontal" funding and strengthen the bottom-up character of the EYCH bore at least some fruit. The Decision (EU) 2017/864 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017 on a European Year of Cultural Heritage (2018)²⁰ eventually featured a small but dedicated European budget of €8 million,²¹ and provided the legal grounds for the active involvement of stakeholders and civil society.²² The EP also succeeded in enshrining a "transversal approach" to the coordination of the EYCH at European level "with a view to creating synergies between the various Union programmes and initiatives that fund projects in the field of cultural heritage",²³ and – perhaps even more remarkably and symbolically significant – to secure its own involvement, as an observer, in the implementation of the EYCH.²⁴ This was the first time that the EP had been included in the realization of a European Year, and was consonant with the Institution's self-understanding as the natural voice of European citizens, a role derived from the Parliament's genuinely democratic legitimacy.

- ²³ Article 5(2).
- ²⁴ Cf. Article 5(1).

¹⁹ Article 5a (new).

²⁰ OJ L 131, 20.05.2017, pp. 1-9.

²¹ In an annexed "Joint Statement", the European Parliament and the Council as the EU's budgetary authority specified that: "In accordance with Article 9 of the Decision, the financial envelope for the implementation of the European Year of Cultural Heritage (2018) is set at EUR 8 million. In order to fund the preparation of the European Year of Cultural Heritage, EUR 1 million will be financed from existing resources in the 2017 budget. For the 2018 budget, EUR 7 million will be reserved for the European Year of Cultural Heritage and be made visible in a budget line. Of that amount, EUR 3 million will come from the resources currently provided for in the Creative Europe Programme and EUR 4 million will be reallocated from other existing resources, without using the existing margins and without prejudice to the powers of the budgetary authority".

²² Cf. Article 5(3): "The Commission shall convene regular meetings of stakeholders and representatives of organisations or bodies active in the field of cultural heritage, including existing transnational cultural networks and relevant NGOs, as well as of youth organisations, to assist it in implementing the European Year at Union level".

Following passage of the legal act, the EP actively accompanied the unfolding of the EYCH, from its official inauguration at the European Culture Forum in Milan in December 2017, through the many activities that took place during the Year, to the concluding conference in Vienna in December 2018 in the framework of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Parliament was involved in helping to advertise the EYCH: it made its Members ambassadors of the Year; ensured the regular participation of EP representatives in the meetings of the EYCH national coordinators; and participated in events and initiatives organized in 2018 at both the European and national levels. Its involvement, however, by no means ended there. The EP also aimed to set its own priorities, and the EP President, Antonio Tajani, in collaboration with the Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education, convened a high-level conference on "Cultural Heritage in Europe" on 26 June 2018. Here lawmakers, European and national political leaders, artists and representatives of museums and other cultural institutions met to discuss the challenges faced by Europe's heritage, how that heritage might be innovated, and how its economic potential might be harnessed. In November 2018, the Committee on Culture and Education organized a two-day interparliamentary committee meeting on "European Cultural Heritage" in Brussels, where MEPs could discuss the different aspects, challenges, and opportunities of European cultural heritage, this time with Members of the national parliaments of both EU Member States and candidate countries. An important focus of that interparliamentary committee meeting - and of the EP's general effort both before and during the EYCH - was to secure the long-term legacy of the Year, and to firmly establish cultural heritage at the heart of European policy making.

The EP's determination that the EYCH and its accomplishments not be forgotten or wasted was undoubtedly partly to thank for the fact that the *New European Agenda for Culture*, adopted in May 2018,²⁵ placed greater emphasis on cultural heritage than had the previous (2007) European Agenda. Moreover, the Commission promised to release a tailored "Action Plan for Cultural Heritage" by the end of 2018. True to its word, that very December the Commission published its *European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage*,²⁶ with a particular view to exploiting the success of the EYCH to encourage more people to discover and engage with Europe's cultural heritage, thereby also reinforcing their sense of belonging to a common European space. The *Framework for Action* aims to promote an integrated and participatory approach to cultural heritage and to contribute to the inclu-

²⁵ See: European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A New European Agenda for Culture, 22.05.2018, COM(2018) 267 final, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX-%3A52018DC0267 [accessed: 28.03.2019].

²⁶ See: European Commission, *Commission Staff Working Document: European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage*, 5.12.2018, SWD(2018) 491 final, https://ec.europa.eu/culture/sites/culture/files/library/ documents/staff-working-document-european-agenda-culture-2018.pdf [accessed: 28.03.2019].

sion of cultural heritage in all EU policies – an approach the EP had been advocating all through the run-up to, as well as during, the EYCH.

Conclusions and Outlook

The European Parliament's support for a dedicated European Year of Culture, and its eventual role as the project's most dedicated proponent, were rooted in two interlinked convictions. The first was that cultural heritage – despite its potential as cement and as a catalyst for the European project and the fact that it had always enjoyed a certain degree of (rather silent) appreciation among European political elites – had never been sufficiently fostered at the European level. It therefore needed to be valorised and welcomed into the centre of the EU's policy making. Secondly, the Parliament believed that cultural heritage represented what was possibly *the* most promising reply to the challenges currently facing the European Union, which can essentially be summed up as an "identity crisis". The assumption underlying that conviction was that cultural heritage might well prove to be our richest source of satisfying answers to the fundamental questions: "who are we?", "where do we come from?", and "where do we want to go?".

Its significant contribution to finally making the initially vague idea of a European Year of Cultural Heritage a reality in 2018 was undoubtedly an achievement for the EP; all the more so given that the Parliament not only helped to conceive the EYCH, but also played an active part in the Year's conceptualization and, indeed, implementation.

In hindsight, however, the EP's general assessment of the EYCH 2018 and its success is ambivalent. At the Year's concluding conference in Vienna (6-7 December 2018), the Chair of the CULT Committee, Petra Kammerevert, summarized Parliament's somewhat mixed assessment of the Year.²⁷

In general, the EYCH could certainly be seen as a success: cultural heritage had undoubtedly been pushed up on the political agenda of the European Union, and the Year had helped to raise public consciousness of Europe's cultural heritage, as well as heritage's added value for the continent's societies. In quantitative terms alone, the several thousand events and initiatives that took place within the framework of the EYCH at the local, regional, national, and European levels, and the several million people directly or indirectly involved in these activities throughout the Year, bear witness to its impact.

At the same time, however, Kammerevert pointed to some notable shortcomings – two in particular. In the first place, the "European" Year had not, in the end,

²⁷ Cf. her interventions not just in the opening panel of the conference, but also her utterances in the official press conference held with Tibor Navracsics, European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, and Gernot Blümel, Austrian Federal Minister for the EU, Arts, Culture and Media, representing the Council; see: EuropeForCulture – Closing Conference of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 in Vienna, Austria, 7 December 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I165292 [accessed: 31.03.2019].

been sufficiently "European". Although initial fears that the Year might become a mere vehicle for self-centred national cultural initiatives, or even be misused to promote narrow-minded cultural chauvinism, turned out to be unfounded, most activities during the EYCH were restricted to specific regional and especially national contexts, with very few genuinely transnational and supranational projects. The notion that 2018 had celebrated a common "European" cultural heritage therefore needs to be qualified.

Secondly, the Year's potential to mobilize and engage civil society was partly squandered. While the suggested number of more than 6 million people involved in activities during the EYCH might seem initially impressive, it represents a tiny proportion of Europe's population, and is for the most part made up of people who already have some affinity to culture and cultural heritage. While undoubtedly not simply an elitist project, the EYCH failed to reach the vast majority of Europe's citizenry, or to open cultural heritage up to new social strata to any substantial extent.

"More Europeanness" and "more outreach": in a nutshell, these are the lessons drawn by the EP from the experience of the EYCH. Both are key to dealing effectively with cultural heritage at the European political level post-2018. The Commission's recent *European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage* to some extent follows the direction envisaged by the EP, but does not entirely meet the latter's expectations: published as a "staff working document" rather than a communication, it has less political weight than, for example, the *European Agenda for Culture*. Thus it remains an open question how willing the Commission actually is to take decisive Union action, and do more than make rhetorical commitments.

Only after the European elections in May 2019 and the subsequent reconstitution of the European Commission will there be more clarity on whether and to what extent cultural heritage is going to be granted continued political attention.

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