

## **Cultural Heritage. Scenarios 2015-2017**

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When I participated in the international Conference about *Cultural heritage. Scenarios 2015* at Ca' Foscari University on 26-28 November 2015, it was shortly after the Cultural Committee of the Chamber of Deputies had hosted Maamoun Abdulkarim, Director-General for Antiquities and Museums in Damascus, who illustrated how the situation of Syria and Iraq's CH was collapsing after ISIS jihadists had brutally murdered Khaled al-Asaad, the Chief of antiquities for the ancient city of Palmyra. An event that deeply impressed the international community, as it was not only a horrible war crime against a civilian, but it also showed IS supporters' utter contempt and hatred against a world heritage site.

Unfortunately, intentional destruction of CH is an everyday occurrence not only in the Middle East, but also in many other places all over the world. A threat against one people's CH is a threat against one people's identity. To defend one people's culture and, more extensively, to promote cultural pluralism is an effective way to reinforce peacekeeping. As members of the Cultural Committee of Italian Parliament, we worked on these concepts and we passed a resolution requiring the Ministry of Culture to make every effort in international settings to strengthen UNESCO's action in the protection of endangered art and culture.

And in fact, thanks to this Parliamentary initiative, the 'Blue Helmets for Culture' were launched during the UNESCO General Conference of Paris in November 2015: a UN specialized organization engaged in the safeguard of CH at risk in conflict areas around the world. The first task force, named *Unite4Heritage* was officially established in February 2016 with the agreement signed by the Italian Government and UNESCO in Rome. It is important to highlight how Italy's institutions have played a major role in reinforcing the principle of 'cultural peacekeeping', which not always has been sufficiently considered by international diplomacy involved in the resolution of the worst conflicts all over the world.

During the last two years, the work of the Cultural Committee has also regarded the field of ICH, a theme that has never been discussed extensively in institutional political context. I was the speaker for the Committee for Law no. 44 of 8 March 2017 on the preservation and enhancement of ICH: this act modifies Law no. 77 of 20 February 2006 by including the cultural practices and elements inscribed on the 2003 UNESCO Convention's Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage (for Italy there are six). Law no. 77 of

2006 is a fundamental act in the Italian legislation for UNESCO heritage sites, as it states that these sites are excellences of Italian cultural and natural heritage and constitute essential features for Italy's representation on a global scale. For this reason the recognition of intangible elements as part of Italian representative CH was simply due.

However, apart from the ratification of 2003 UNESCO Convention (Law no. 167 of 27 September 2007) and Law no. 44 of 2017 (specifically regarding UNESCO heritage lists), no comprehensive law on the safeguard of ICH is present in the Italian legislation. It was exactly to solve this *vacatio legis* that the project team coordinated by Prof. Marco Giampieretti worked on a text that I have recently presented at the Chamber of Deputies as the Draft Law on the Safeguard of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (no. 4486).

At the same time, the team has worked on the Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, signed in Faro on 27 October 2005 (no. 4485), since Italy has not fulfilled it yet, and I have presented a draft text together with the above mentioned one on ICH. The topics of the two laws are clearly interrelated and therefore a joint discussion of both texts in the Cultural Committee would be highly recommended. Of course, the opening of an institutional debate about the value of CH and, in particular, about its intangible elements, must be stimulated and accompanied by a vast academic support. In this sense, the publication of this periodical comes at a very propitious moment.

I want to thank especially Professor Zagato, Dr. Pinton and Professor Giampieretti for involving me in this distinguished project. I will work for a rapid approval by Italian Parliament of both the ratification of Faro Convention and the law on ICH, even though most probably we will not succeed during the present legislature. Nevertheless, the foundation stone has been laid.