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**THE ROLE OF CULTURE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE IN CONFLICT
PREVENTION, TRANSFORMATION, RESOLUTION AND POST-
CONFLICT ACTION: THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE APPROACH**

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Introduction

The Council of Europe's role in conflict prevention and crisis management is defined in its statute, adopted by the founding European governments in 1949, just after the Second World War. The Organisation's contribution targets a structural prevention of conflict through its multilateral tools, with the collection and analysis of information on the root causes of conflicts before they erupt, and the development of conflict prevention strategies in coordination with other international organisations.

For over sixty years, the Council of Europe has adopted this approach, helping to make Europe a large space of democratic security. The conflicts in the Balkans during the 1990s reinforced the idea that the Organisation's core values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, together with effective intercultural dialogue and the appropriate socio-political and socio-economic conditions, are vital elements for preventing and overcoming conflicts.

The importance of cultural co-operation and intercultural dialogue has become ever more visible over the years. There is scarcely a domestic or foreign policy field which is not also to some extent a cultural policy field (e.g. environmental policy, peace policy, education/science policy, developmental/co-operation policy). At the same time, it appears that the number of cultural conflicts worldwide – ie those in which culture is an issue – has exceeded the number of non-cultural conflicts since the mid-1980s.

The Council of Europe has developed skills and intervention tools in the field of culture and cultural heritage in order to contribute effectively to the Organisation's priorities and core values during conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict action. The Organisation's approach to this is process-oriented and inclusive. It involves different stakeholders, from national governments to civil society actors and practitioners in all relevant fields.

Background and Council of Europe activities

Throughout history, cultural expressions, assets and cultural heritage have often been a target for destruction during conflicts, mainly because of their identity value (religious, social, cultural, etc.) for particular groups of the population, and for the cohesion they reflect. There is no congruence between concepts such as culture and the state, state and nation or nation and culture. The diversity of and differences between cultural environments, languages, religions, histories and heritage constitute Europe's – and the world's – cultural richness.

Destroying the cultural expressions and the heritage associated with a specific identity hampers those people who claim that identity from uniting and, in the long-term, prevents the group from expressing itself and from fulfilling its potential as European citizens.

The expression of diversity (cultural, ethnic or religious) is not an impediment to development, but rather adds to the wealth of a country and a community in the face of globalisation, both in terms of competitiveness and attractiveness. Heritage is indeed a source of local development which has immediate repercussions on employment and the economic vitality of various sectors (restoration, urban regeneration, tourism, etc) and specific traditional activities. It can be a constructive element which helps to find common ground for all members of the community. To promote heritage in all its diversity improves self-image and confidence in the shared future, increases well-being and reinforces the social cohesion on which a common vision of the future can be constructed and implemented for a peaceful and prosperous society.

Heritage is understood both as an expression of the identities that must be respected in order to establish a dialogue between communities and for building tolerance, as well as a factor for development, allowing communities to express their social vision and to project it into the future. The joint management of heritage from different origins creates a shared sense of responsibility for the preservation of cultural diversity. The Council of Europe has developed the idea of a "common European heritage" since its creation in 1950. This fundamental concept underlines the positive forces that have enabled different European cultures to enrich one another over the centuries, and that allow them to continue developing today. This is the essence of the 2005 *Faro Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* and the *Technical Cooperation Programme on the integrated conservation of cultural and natural heritage* which helps to implement the principles of the conventions and the values of the Organisation on the ground.

Conflict Prevention

In the 1990s, the Council of Europe carried out the "Dialogue and Conflict Prevention Project", which provided the basis for the "White paper process", leading to the adoption of the "White paper on intercultural dialogue" in 2008 and drawing up an intersectoral political strategy based, *inter alia*, on the Council of Europe's Ministerial Declaration on Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention (Opatija, Croatia, October 2003).

Another focus within the cultural policy programme is on the evaluation of national cultural policies. The many reviews carried out in countries of conflict in the Balkans have contributed to a better understanding of the complexities of national situations, needs and opportunities, as far as culture is concerned.

Over the past few decades, the Council of Europe has consistently supported the promotion of identity and diversity, access to and participation in cultural life, and creativity. Today, culture is not only recognised for its contribution to the formation of identities and a sense of belonging, for its economic and market impact, but also for its social and educational potential – that is to say, its power to foster coexistence in multicultural and pluralist societies. It is thus of key importance to underline the basic link between culture and human rights, and culture's central role in attaining full human development. A society that nurtures cultural needs in conditions of liberty has a greater chance of developing a sense of social responsibility among its members and bringing democracy alive. In this way, conflicts are prevented, or resources are found to overcome existing conflicts.

Since 1987, the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes Programme has been supporting grassroots initiatives for culture and tourism that focus on the contribution of minority cultures (Arab, Jewish, Romani) to European culture and heritage, and foster intercultural understanding.

A new initiative, "Artists for Dialogue", features art projects as a way of bringing people and cultures more closely together, with a focus on dialogue between Europe and its neighbouring regions, including Islamic states.

The implementation strategy of the *Technical Co-operation and Consultancy Programme related to the integrated conservation of cultural and natural heritage focused on a regional approach (Regional Cooperation Division, DGIV)* helps to strengthen cooperation between member States through cross-border and transnational projects. Regional Programmes in South-East Europe, the South Caucasus and Black Sea regions, based on local and regional development strategies, contribute to conflict-prevention objectives.

Conflict Resolution

Since 2008, the Council of Europe has been developing an intercultural model for the integration of migrants and minorities at local level, through the Intercultural Cities Programme. This model is based on the idea that cultural differences should not be considered as a problem, but rather as an asset to encourage social and economic development. The model provides tools for dealing with cultural conflict through new governance structures, capacity building, mediation, and the setting up of special bodies for cultural and religious conflict prevention/resolution.

Post-Conflict processes

Regional Programmes in South-East Europe and the South Caucasus, aimed at fostering local and regional development strategies, have demonstrated their important role in post-conflict processes. Projects for immediate action are also set up using the experience acquired in the Council of Europe's *Technical Co-operation and Consultancy Programme related to the integrated conservation of the cultural and natural heritage*, following various catastrophes that have struck European countries over the past few years, particularly the wars in South-East Europe (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo¹), the earthquake in Georgia in 2002 and, more recently, the conflict in Georgia in August 2008.

These specific activities aim to manage post-crisis situations and define reconstruction policies. Several projects have already been carried out in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and Kosovo, and more recently in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. As a result of these activities, the Council of Europe has reinforced its expertise in issues relating to problem-solving in a post-conflict context, through numerous expert missions. The new reference framework for the technical co-operation programme has consequently oriented the major aim towards sustainable social and economic development. This contributes to the Council of Europe's ethical goal to work towards peaceful societies, to build a fairer and safer world in order to ensure a better quality of life for all, according to the principles of human rights.

The projects integrate the values and principles promoted by the Council of Europe, giving priority *inter alia* to human rights, defining the protection of goods, respect for private property, security of persons, the right to housing and the right to education and jobs. The Organisation's specific approach regards the "reconstruction" process designed more as a "rehabilitation" process, aimed at recuperating and preserving the cultural and built environment of the populations. The purpose is to preserve a certain lifestyle that could help convince inhabitants to remain in (or return to) their villages, making sure that affected regions do not face post-conflict trauma with progressive impoverishment or even abandonment.

Reconstruction and development is therefore a priority in conflict areas, not only for accommodating the inhabitants and ensuring the right conditions for the return of displaced persons, but also for preserving the spirit of the communities. This must include restoring the social cohesion that prevailed before the conflict in order to re-establish and maintain the living and development potential of the communities. The reconstruction process means resuming development processes on the basis of the past reference framework and ensuring its continuity. In line with human rights, the restoration of the social and cultural environment is the key condition for sustaining the objectives of the reconstruction process.

Monitoring Developments

With specific information and monitoring tools in the field of cultural heritage (HEREIN at <http://european-heritage.coe.int>) and cultural policies (Compendium at <http://culturalpolicies.net>) – both part of the Council of Europe's cultural governance observatory function CultureWatchEurope – the Organisation is well placed to constantly follow up on developments, policies and action related to culture and conflict. This includes, *inter alia*, the systematic collection and update of data on national models of managing cultural diversity in a cultural, administrative and legal perspective as well as the gathering of good practices in intercultural dialogue from the cultural field and specifically, with a view to the reconstruction and development of cultural heritage. CultureWatchEurope also offers a platform for dynamic exchange between cultural policy makers at governmental level and civil society actors and practitioners. It thereby contributes to overall insight and progress on significant issues such as culture and conflict in Europe, and, given the global nature of the issues at stake, also beyond.

¹ All references to Kosovo, whether the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nation's Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

Appendix 1 The Council of Europe's approach to heritage in conflict processes

In the past, the Council of Europe has been confronted with many situations where heritage has been an important element in different kinds or stages of conflicts, and the Organisation has defined appropriate possibilities for action:

More often than not, cultural heritage and in particular monuments are deliberately targeted during a conflict, as it is seen as a symbol linking identity to a specific place. Heritage is looted for personal benefits during a period of legal vacuum generated by war, or is systematically destroyed to prevent a community from rebuilding its identity. The radical exclusion of this heritage over the long term is thus considered as a "victory".

Heritage as a tool for conflict prevention

- Heritage is both an element of identity common to all Europeans and a factor for differentiation. It is a channel for knowledge and the mutual recognition of diversity, stimulating dialogue between people and communities; duplication with first page
- Heritage is a means for people to understand each other. It contributes, through tolerance, to the prevention of conflicts (see [Article 7 of the Faro Convention](#));
- This approach is particularly important where heritage is likely to become a source of conflict, where it is the expression of contested identities or where conflicts arise from opposing feelings of identity and from "fear of otherness". This can result in heritage being seen as exhorting conflict;

Heritage as a factor towards conflict resolution

- Access to culture and heritage is a fundamental right. Everyone has the right to choose their identity, and everyone has a duty to respect the identity of others. This defines the principle of shared responsibility that impacts on the conservation of cultural identity and dialogue;
- The ethical approach contained in the Council of Europe's non-discriminatory principles implies that a cultural identity expressed by a community is a political act based on a collective memory;
- Without this collective effort to define and promote what unites the members of a group, there is no possible common future and no balanced, solid or peaceful development for this group;
- Cultural, ethical or religious pluralism is not a hindrance to development, but rather a source of richness, vitality and adaptability for the society confronted by the challenges of reconstruction (physical or moral) and globalisation.

Heritage as a starting point in reconstruction / post conflict development (physical, social, moral)

- By managing the crisis by implementing post-conflict strategies, the aim is to normalise societies through social and economic activities, which define the principle of development;
- The integration of heritage into reconstruction or development processes (after wars or catastrophes) facilitates the creation and implementation of projects which respond to the needs of the population after a crisis (housing, a familiar cultural environment, with landmarks and social customs, traditional activities, etc.);
- The contribution of heritage to local development can be measured by the immediate impact on the economy and on employment in several sectors (restoration of buildings, urban regeneration, rural development, cultural activities and tourism). It can also be measured by the various benefits for the community (improvement of image, well-being, a feeling of identity, social cohesion, attractiveness);
- However, a post-conflict situation is sometimes an opportunity to disregard the rules protecting heritage (speculative operations, illegal building, etc);
- Heritage is rarely taken into adequate account by reconstruction policies and strategies: its historic/cultural/identity value is neglected; its social and economic value is not recognised or understood.