

PRESS RELEASE

October 2008

START OF EUROPEAN HERITAGE LEGAL FORUM

The new European EHLF (European Heritage Legal Forum) consultation body recently had its first meeting in the prestigious embassy of the Free State of Bavaria near the European Union in Brussels, directly opposite the entrance to the building of the European Parliament. The EHLF is composed of representatives of several European countries who investigate the effect of EU legislation on European cultural heritage. Although cultural heritage is a major economic factor for Europe, especially from a touristic point of view, the European Union has no direct say on this. This field is reserved for the individual member states themselves. However, legislation in other areas, on which Europe has a say, such as the environment, working conditions etc., increasingly affects the preservation of our monuments and landscapes. Of course, European legislation never purposely harms monuments, but there may often be harmful side effects resulting from a law or a measure, whose consequences could not be assessed sufficiently in advance.

Harmful side effects

Time and again such harmful side effects to cultural heritage have to be countered in individual countries by implementing exception clauses if and where possible. Since some countries fail to do this at all, and others do this in their own ways, a highly differentiated, hard to oversee landscape of legislation on the protection of cultural heritage has come into being in Europe.

For example, of course, paintings of old masters have to be restored with the same lead-containing paint originally used by the old masters, despite the European ban on the use of paints which contain metals. Of course, the doors of our historic churches have to continue to open inwards as a sign of welcome, despite the European obligation that all doors of public buildings have to open outward for reasons of fire safety. And of course we must prevent all windows of historic buildings being replaced by plastic windows because they fail to comply with European environmental requirements.

In this respect, the EHLF aims to achieve that, in the future, all intended EU legislation is assessed in advance as to the harmful side effects which such measures may have for cultural heritage. Recommendations for exceptions or for developing alternatives can then be formulated at an early stage and may even already be integrated into the intended legislation.

European Heritage Heads Forum

The direct cause for creating the EHLF was a meeting in Copenhagen, earlier this year, of the European EHHF (European Heritage Heads Forum), an annual meeting of the directors of national government bodies on the preservation of cultural heritage of the European countries. It was here that the need to streamline European rules which negatively affect the preservation of cultural heritage was recognised.

The EHLF is the continuation of a former working committee, called ECHO (European Working Group on EU Directives and Cultural Heritage), which had been active in this field for some years.

The EHLF is managed by a secretariat on which representatives of Norway (Riksantikvaren, Directorate for Cultural Heritage), the UK (English Heritage), the Netherlands (Monumentenwacht Noord-Brabant), France (Ministry of Culture and Communication) and Finland (National Board of Antiquities) have a seat.

End of press release

Note for the editors (not intended for publication):

For further information on the backgrounds and activities of EHLF please contact its chairman, Terje Nypan. He can be reached by e-mail EHLF@ra.no

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