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Information note on the European Heritage Label

The European Heritage Label was launched as an intergovernmental initiative by several European states in 2007. It aims to "strengthen the support of European citizens for a shared European identity and to foster a sense of belonging to a common cultural space". To be awarded the Label, heritage sites must highlight their European significance and a plaque bearing the Label logo is mounted at the entrance to such sites. To date, 60 sites located in 18 European states have obtained the European Heritage Label. Seventeen of these states are Member States of the European Union.

At its meeting on 20 November 2008, the Council of Ministers adopted conclusions inviting the European Commission to submit to it "an appropriate proposal for the creation of a European Heritage Label by the European Union and specifying the practical procedures for the implementation of the project." In other words, following the example of the European Capitals of Culture, the Council wishes to transform the current intergovernmental European Heritage Label into a formal European Union initiative. The aim of "europeanising" the Label in this way is to improve its operational efficiency, enhance its impact and also enable it to take on a new dimension.

The main objectives of the new European Heritage Label would be to help to:

- increase knowledge and appreciation among European citizens, especially young people, of their common history and their shared yet diverse cultural heritage;
- promote the democratic values and human rights that form the foundation of European integration;
- give European citizens a greater sense of belonging to the European Union in addition to their respective countries and thus stimulate their active participation in the European democratic process;
- increase the economic attractiveness and sustainable development of the regions, in particular through cultural tourism.

Other international cultural heritage initiatives already exist, such as the UNESCO World Heritage List, the main purpose of which is to protect monuments and sites of universal value, and the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes, which emphasise mutual influences and the sharing of common values. It would therefore be especially important for the new European Heritage Label to clearly show how it is distinct from and complements these initiatives. Its added value would be due in particular to the European significance of the sites selected, the extent to which they implement ambitious cultural and educational

programmes and networking between sites to share best practice and launch joint projects.

Following the Council's conclusions and in line with its procedures, the European Commission has launched an impact assessment, which includes public consultation. The aim of the impact assessment is to determine whether action by the European Union is indeed justified in this area and whether it really can add value to the European Heritage Label. If this is the case, it will also help to determine what form the action should take.

Public consultation will be on-line and by means of a public meeting in Brussels on 10 June 2009 with organisations working in the heritage sector and a meeting on 24 June 2009 with the experts designated by the Member States. The European Commission has also commissioned an independent study on the potential social, economic and environmental impacts of the European Heritage Label.

The results of the public consultation and study will be included in the final impact assessment report in autumn 2009 and will be used as a basis for any European Commission proposal concerning the European Heritage Label. If applicable, the proposal could be adopted by the Commission at the beginning of 2010. If the proposal requires the adoption of a legal basis, a co-decision procedure between the Council and the European Parliament will then be launched.