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Dear Chairman,

I would like to thank you for your letter of 25 October 2010 and for forwarding the Opinion of the Parliament of Romania as regards the Commission proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a European Union action for the European Heritage Label {COM (2010) 76 final}.

The proposal aims to bring citizens, especially young people, closer to the European Union by giving them new opportunities to learn about our common yet diverse cultural heritage, about the history and the development of the European Union, and about the democratic values and human rights that underpin European integration. The Label is also expected to help increase cultural tourism and to bring possible economic benefits to the areas concerned. We believe that this Label has the potential to become a highly visible and valuable initiative for the European Union and to acquire the same renown and "brand" value, as the European Capitals of Culture, which are celebrating this year their 25th anniversary.

Carefully studying your Opinion, we took note of the concerns expressed by the Romanian Parliament regarding the proposed selection procedures. In this regard, we would like to provide you with further clarification as to why the Commission has proposed such selection procedures.

I would first like to recall that the Commission proposal was a response to the conclusions adopted unanimously by the Council of Ministers in November 2008 asking the Commission to make a proposal for the transformation of the existing intergovernmental Label into a formal action of the European Union. As you may be aware, the procedures of the Commission require every new proposal to be based firstly on a public consultation and secondly on the assessment of the social, economic and environmental impacts of the various policy options. In the case of the Label, the Commission carried out a broad public consultation which consisted of an on-line consultation, a public meeting open to all interested individuals and organisations, and a meeting with experts designated by all of the 27 Member States in the first semester of

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2009. The Commission then completed its Impact Assessment which was submitted to the Impact Assessment Board in November 2009 and subsequently discussed in the Cultural Affairs Committee of the Council of Ministers in April 2010. It is important to stress that the Commission proposal was strictly based on the results of the public consultation and of the Impact Assessment.

As regards the two stage selection procedure, you make a direct reference to the Impact Assessment report by pointing out that option 3(a) (selection procedure at national level only) is your preferred option. However, I would like to underline that the Impact Assessment has precisely demonstrated that this option would not have improved sufficiently on the weaknesses of the current intergovernmental Label; in particular, it would not have provided a mechanism for ensuring the correct application of the criteria, and would thus only have had a very limited added value. On the other hand, the Impact Assessment showed that option 3(c) (two stage selection procedure) had the strongest potential to increase access to cultural heritage resources, especially for young people, and to have positive effects on the tourism industry, including the number of people employed. Option 3(c) was also the most likely to ensure a consistent application of the criteria, a fair distribution of sites across Europe, the commitment and the ownership of all the Member States, and the most likely to improve the visibility and profile of the Label. It was also clearly requested in the conclusions adopted unanimously by the Council of Ministers in November 2008 (§3b) and emerged very strongly as the preferred option of the various stakeholders during the on-line consultation and the public meeting, as well as during the meeting with the experts designated by the Member States. For all these reasons option 3(c) was selected as the preferred option and was therefore presented as part of the Commission proposal.

Furthermore, the proposal that the final selection at European level should be carried out by a European panel of independent experts was also based on the results of the public consultation. As you know, the Commission recommended that the 12 members of this panel should be nominated by the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission and that they should have substantial experience and expertise in the field of culture, heritage, European history, or other fields relevant to the objectives of the Label (Article 8). The Commission thus expects that the competences of the experts will be complementary and that the geographic representation in the panel will be balanced. This complementarity and the fact that the recommendation as to whether to select or reject the application of a site will not be taken individually by a single expert, but always collegially by the members of the European panel, should limit any risk of subjectivity and ensure the selection of sites which have played a significant role in our common history and which are of importance for all the citizens and all the Member States of the European Union.

You mention in your Opinion the need to support Member States in the preparation of the applications of candidate sites and you suggest the elaboration of a guide or of documentary studies. The Commission shares your view that this aspect is important for the success of the Label and believes that it is already covered by Article 16 of its proposal which states that the Commission shall establish guidelines for the selection and monitoring procedures.

As you know, the ordinary legislative procedure started in March 2010 and discussions are now well underway both in the European Parliament, which adopted its position at first reading on 16 December 2010, and in the Council of Ministers. Our aim is to have the proposal adopted within a reasonable time frame so that the new Label can be implemented as soon as possible.

The European Commission thanks the Parliament of Romania for its opinion and for the constructive approach to this issue. We hope that the explanations contained in this letter will serve to clarify the Commission's position on the concerns raised in the Opinion.

Yours faithfully,