

Atelier 1

La protection du patrimoine culturel de la Méditerranée Workshop on Mediterranean cultural heritage law

There is considerable public interest in the protection of our environment and wildlife heritage. However, the damage to our cultural heritage from the highly profitable illicit antiquities market has not received the same degree of attention.

Mediterranean countries face a unique challenge in this regard. The Mediterranean Sea is the cradle of modern civilisation and the countries that border its shores are “source” countries for some of the world's most sought-after archeological finds and cultural treasures. Some Mediterranean countries are also world-renowned centres for buying and selling antiquities, and have the problems of protecting their own cultural heritage and also that of countries whose limited resources mean they are losing the battle against antiquities looting.

As the 2009 convention of the Juristes de l'Union pour la Méditerranée will be held in Egypt, this is an ideal opportunity to review Mediterranean and international law provisions for the protection of the Mediterranean cultural heritage. Few countries can equal Egypt's long experience in protecting its spectacular wealth of antiquities.

The issues to be discussed at this half-day workshop will include:

1. How successful are the 1972 UNESCO Convention, the Unidroit Convention on Stolen or Illegally Imported Cultural Objects and European Community Law in preventing the illicit trade in antiquities and other cultural heritage items? Would a separate treaty for Mediterranean countries be more effective?
2. How successful are laws in individual Mediterranean countries? What are the procedures that are working? Are criminal sanctions sufficient, and should penalties be increased? Can we learn from mistakes made in legislation concerning the illicit drugs and wildlife market?
3. Is a proactive approach to prevention the answer? Are administrative measures (e.g. provenance, dealer licence and customs regulations) useful? Could social factors such as education in “market” countries discourage dealers and purchasers from buying looted antiquities make a difference?