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The European Heritage Label

1 Development of a European Heritage Label

On 20 May 2011, European Union Culture Ministers reached agreement on the creation of a 'European Heritage Label', designed to 'highlight sites that celebrate and symbolise European integration, ideals and history', and 'values such as democracy, freedom or diversity'¹. The European Commission states that:

...the Label will seek to enhance the value and profile of sites which have played a key role in the history and the building of the European Union, and seek to increase European citizens' understanding of the building of Europe, and of their common yet diverse cultural heritage, especially related to the democratic values and human rights that underpin European integration².

The label will be awarded to sites on the basis of their European symbolic value and educational work, rather than on their architectural qualities or beauty. However, although agreement has been reached between the European Parliament, the Council

¹ European Commission. 9.3.10. 'Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a European Union action for the European Heritage Label'. *Official Journal of the European Union*. COM(2010) 76 final: <http://nia1.me/hj>

² European Commission: Culture. 'European Heritage Label': <http://nia1.me/hh> Accessed 14.10.11.

and the Commission, a formal Decision that would establish the new label is not due to enter into force until December³.

The European Heritage Label initiative began in 2006 as a voluntary inter-governmental initiative in which 17 EU member states and Switzerland participated. This version of the designation was awarded to 64 sites between 2006 and 2011. The heritage sites included in this list are presented in Annexe 1.

In November 2008, the Council requested that this initiative be transformed into a Community action 'in order to extend it and improve its functioning'. The legal basis for this is provided by Article 167 of the Lisbon Treaty, which states that the EU will contribute to 'the flowering of the cultures of the member states...at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore'⁴. The article states that EU action should support and supplement the efforts of member states to improve and disseminate the culture and history of the European peoples. It gives the European Council and the European Parliament power to adopt incentive measures to contribute to the achievement of the article's objectives.

2 Application and criteria

Now that the label has been formally adopted as a European Union designation, all of the 64 sites previously awarded a label under the previous arrangements will be required to re-apply for European Heritage Label status. The first sites to receive the new label will be announced in 2013. In 2013–14, member states will be able to nominate four new sites to receive the award.

At the first stage, pre-selection of the heritage sites to go forward for consideration is made by the member state (ie not by a devolved administration acting alone)⁵. A panel of independent experts will then assess the nominations and select which should be awarded the label. The panel will have 12 members who are expert in European history, culture or other relevant matters. Four will be appointed by the Council, four by the Commission and four by the European Parliament. From 2015, selection will take place every two years, with member states able to nominate up to two sites each time, with the selection panel selecting a maximum of one site per member state in every year in which a selection is made.

Article 2 of the Council conclusion defines sites as 'monuments, natural or urban sites, cultural landscapes, places of remembrance, cultural goods and objects, intangible heritage attached to a place, including contemporary heritage'.

³ Correspondence with Directorate General for Education and Culture, European Commission. 18.10.11.

⁴ European Union. 2010. *Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*. (Also referred to as the Treaty of Lisbon): Article 167: <http://nia1.me/hm>

⁵ European Commission. 9.3.10. 'Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a European Union action for the European Heritage Label'. *Official Journal of the European Union*. COM(2010) 76 final: <http://nia1.me/hj>

A number of criteria are set out in Article 7 of the Decision, including the following:

- Candidates for the label will have a symbolic European value and will need to justify their cross-border or pan-European nature, the role of the site in European history and integration, or the role of a site in the development of the common values that underpin European integration.
- Sites selected will be responsible for raising awareness about the European significance of the site by providing information, organising educational activities which will increase understanding of the common history of Europe, promoting multilingualism, and the organisation of cultural activities.
- Candidates for the label are to submit a management plan which commits them to ensuring the sound management and protection of the site, ensuring access for the widest possible public, undertaking the promotion of sites as tourist destinations, and developing a communication strategy which highlights the European significance of the site.

3 The UK government's view

The UK did not participate in the previous version of the European Heritage Label, organised on an inter-governmental basis.

An early proposal for a European Heritage Label was scrutinised by the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee. The committee wrote to the Minister for Culture and Tourism at the time and received a response indicating that the UK government retained its doubts about the need for an EU European Heritage Label⁶. In its view, the UNESCO World Heritage List is sufficient for designating supra-national significance. The government also stated that they believed there is a risk that the complexity and burden of managing a European Heritage Label scheme would increase. The Minister at the time stated that the government took the view that the UK should not take part in the scheme.

Subsequent to this, the Coalition Government has made a statement which largely agrees with the previous government's position:

Although the UK has not opposed the creation of the EHL (European Heritage Label) in principle, the Government have reservations about the need for a new scheme that presents the potential for duplication of the UNESCO world heritage list. Throughout negotiations the UK actively supported the voluntary nature of the scheme; opposed any additional cost burdens; and supported changes to make the scheme as light touch as possible. As there is a risk that funding for the EHL in 2013 will be taken

⁶ House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee. 15.3.10: 'European Heritage Label: The Government's View': <http://nia1.me/gb>

from the margins of the EU budget, the UK has maintained a reserve on financial provisions and intends to abstain in the final vote⁷.

Subsequent to this statement, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has confirmed that the UK will not be participating in the scheme at least until an initial evaluation has been completed, which at present is set for year six⁸. The Directorate-General for Culture and Education at the European Commission has confirmed that the UK is the only member state to have indicated that it will not at present be participating in the European Heritage Label⁹.

The House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee has published its own response to the EU proposal, stating that¹⁰:

We share the Government's view that an EU Heritage Label scheme should be created only if there is a strong justification for it. We also share its doubts that the case has been made. It is clear, however, that many other Member States value the current inter-governmental scheme. So there may be wide support for the draft Decision. We agree with the Government that it is vital that participation in the EU scheme should be entirely voluntary.

4 The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's view

By contrast, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure has indicated that she is 'supportive of the scheme'. In a letter, she has stated that¹¹:

...I would welcome any opportunity for the North of Ireland to have its cultural sites such as the Pilgrim Route in Fermanagh, Gracehill (a Moravion settlement), the Navan Centre (a Kingly site of Ireland), and Derry, to name just a few, to have the opportunity to be considered for European Heritage status. The importance of some of these...becomes magnified when considered in a transnational context.

⁷ Ministerial Statement by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport in the House of Commons: 'Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council'. 19.5.11.

⁸ Correspondence with DCMS, 18.10.11.

⁹ Correspondence with Directorate General for Education and Culture, European Commission. 18.10.11.

¹⁰ House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee. 15.3.10: 'European Heritage Label: Conclusion': <http://nia1.me/gb>

¹¹ Correspondence from the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Carál Ní Chuilín MLA, 5.12.11: Ref: GM/1326/2011.

Annexe 1: Heritage sites previously assigned European Heritage Label status under inter-governmental arrangements

COUNTRY	SITE
BELGIUM	Palace of the Prince-Bishops at Liège Stoneware of Raeren (German-speaking community) Archaeological site of Ename Archaeological site of Coudenberg
BULGARIA	Archaeological site of Debelt Memorial Vassil Levski Historic town of Rousse Boris Christoff Music Centre
CYPRUS	Fortifications of Nicosia Castle of Kolossi Site of Kourion Circuit of 6 churches with Byzantine and post Byzantine frescos, Troodos
CZECH REPUBLIC	Castle of Kyn žvart Zlín, town of Tom áš Bat'a Vítkovice coal mine at Ostrava Memorial of Anton í n Dvo řá k at Vysok á u P ř í b r a m i
FRANCE	Cluny Abbey House of Robert Schuman, near Metz Pope's Palace Court, Avignon
GREECE	Acrópolis, Athens Knossos Palace Archaeological site of Poliochne Byzantine site of Monemvasia
HUNGARY	Royal castle of Esztergom Szigetv á r fortress The Reformed college and great church at Debrecen

COUNTRY	SITE
	Royal palace of Visegrád
ITALY	Birthplaces of Rossini, Puccini and Verdi Birthplace of Alcide De Gasperi Ventotene Island Capitole Place in Roma
LATVIA	Historic centre of Riga Rundāle Palace Town of Kuldīga
LITHUANIA	Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis' works Historical centre of Kaunas Žemaitija (lowlands) region and the Hill of Crosses Museum of Genocide Victims (1940-41) at Vilnius
MALTA	Catacombs of Rabat
POLAND	Gdańsk Shipyards Hill of Lech at Gniezno (Cathedral, church, palaces, museum) Cathedral St Vaclav and Stanislav in Kraków Town of Lublin
PORTUGAL	Braga cathedral Convent of Jesus at Setúbal General library of the University of Coimbra Abolition of the death penalty
ROMANIA	Archaeological site of Istria Cantacuzino Palace at Bucharest Romanian Athenaeum at Bucarest Park Brâncuşi at Târgu Jiu
SLOVAKIA	Pre Romanesque Ecclesiastical Architecture, St Margaret church, Kopčany The Castle of Červený Kameň The Barrow of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik at Bradlo
SLOVENIA	Memorial church of the Holy Spirit at Javorca

COUNTRY	SITE
	Franja Hospital at Dolenji Novaki Zale Cemetery at Ljubljana
SPAIN	Crown of Aragon Archive Yuste Royal Monastery Cap Finisterre Students Residence, Madrid
SWITZERLAND	St Peter Cathedral in Geneva Castle of La Sarraz Hospice of St Gotthard