



# Returning (to) cultural heritage

Discussing the role of cultural and religious heritage  
in the EU-AU partnership

**1 DECEMBER 2021**  
**14:00 - 15:30 CET**

**WEBINAR**

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# Concept



**Cultural heritage** is one of the most valuable drivers of social cohesion, intercultural encounter and economic, as well as human development: it forms part of peoples' identity and spirituality, carries powerful symbolical meanings, and leads to sound practices of **community-building** and integration. Religious and cultural heritage, with its cross-cutting characteristics, immensely contributes to several of the Sustainable Development Goals, supporting peace, sustainability, quality education and well-being.

As a bearer of a highly rich and diverse culture, the **African Union (AU)** has been keen on valorising cultural heritage through its 2021 thematic year "Art, Culture and Heritage: Levers for building the Africa we want". By dedicating this year to such areas, the African Union recognises the importance of the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) in achieving the **Agenda 2063** objectives of African regional integration, aiming for inclusive and sustainable development in the continent.

Bound by longstanding historical ties and an ever-closer **partnership with Africa**, how is the European Union responding to this call to cherish religious and cultural heritage? At national level, an increasing number of EU Member States have already decided to address the question of **returning cultural goods illicitly obtained** under colonial regimes. Such initiatives emphasise that cultural heritage can today also serve as a means to better address historical challenges and foster dialogue and partnerships among governments, societies, communities and, ultimately, citizens.

However, challenges still persist and the cultural and creative sectors, especially in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, are in urgent need of stimuli and increased financial support, also at European level. What **role** will the promotion of religious and cultural heritage play in the future EU-AU partnership and how can its cultural dimension be better addressed? What **strategies** should be set up to reinvigorate a true discussion on the importance of cultural cooperation for more sustainable, cohesive and resilient societies, to reach an authentic "culture of dialogue" as mentioned by Pope Francis in his recent encyclical letter "Fratelli Tutti"? In what ways can cultural and religious heritage build bridges and foster processes of **peacebuilding** in conflictual situations, as recently recognised by the Council of the EU in its June 2021 conclusions?

In view of the February 2022 EU-AU summit, the event "**Returning (to) cultural heritage - Discussing the role of cultural and religious heritage in the EU-AU partnership**" will address these and other questions, in exchange with panellists from Africa and Europe, trying to discuss current policies, best practices and future orientations for the links between cultural heritage and international partnerships.



## Webinar programme



# Webinar programme

14:00-14:05

## Welcome and opening remarks

*Rev. Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto*

General Secretary of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU (COMECE)

14:05-14:30

## Keynote speeches

*Mr. Milan Zver*

Member of the European Parliament  
Vice-Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education

*Ms. Jelka Pirkovič*

Director General for cultural heritage  
Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia

14:30-15:00

## Panel debate

*Rev. Fr. Terwase Henry Akaabiam*

General Secretary of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM)

*Mr. Guido Gryseels*

Director of The Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren

*Ms. Marija Brus*

Advisor, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia

15:00-15:30

## Q&A and Discussion

