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WRITTEN DECLARATION

pursuant to Rule 116 of the Rules of Procedure

by Mikel Irujo, Rebecca Harms and Csaba Tabajdi

on Protection of Caves as cultural, natural and environmental Heritage

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[0033/2008]

Written declaration on Protection of Caves as cultural, natural and environmental Heritage

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 151 of the EC Treaty,
 - having regard to the UNESCO convention of 16 November 1976 concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage,
- A. whereas there is no existent European law or directive related to the protection of caves and their content like speleothems, and archaeological and paleontological findings,
- B. whereas caves present unique geotopes in the European natural and archaeological heritage that can only be preserved by protecting the caves themselves in combination with their surrounding,
- C. Whereas conservation of the numerous elements of archaeological and speleological heritage provides a foundation for further social and economic development and thereby enhances environmental protection, employment opportunities and European integration,
1. Calls to the Commission, in drafting its legislative proposals, to implement effectively the cultural protection, as it is written on article 151 of ECT, and the geotope protection with regard to karst and caves as natural sites, and cultural settlements, with a view to ensuring that measures to promote them are embodied in all EU policies;
 2. Considers that the factors to be taken into account in order to develop these particular sectors with due regard to the subsidiarity principle, must include:
 - a systematic survey of caves, in general and their surroundings, and of the environmental and archaeological heritage
 - the creation of a legislative framework to guarantee their protection, incorporating incentives for the conservation of karst area, caves and the archaeological heritage, and for measures to ensure that new buildings and industrial activities are compatible with nearby environmental and archaeological heritage
 - the incorporation of the incentives for conservation of caves, ensuring that this heritage will continue to be studied by specialist such as speleologists, geo(morpho)logists, archaeologists, palaeontologists, biologists, climatologists, etc.
 - Financial assistance for projects, conservation and restoration
 3. Calls on the Member States, Regions and local authorities, in cooperation with the Commission, to promote the protection and conservation of their caves and their archaeological heritage through the structural funds;
 4. Calls to the Commission to promote the sharing and exchange of experiences in this field through conferences and meetings all around Europe.