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Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

Thank you for your letter of 14 December 2020 in which you have expressed your concerns regarding trafficking of cultural goods.

Organised crime continues to be one of the greatest threats to the security of the European Union and its citizens. Criminals know no physical nor virtual internal borders, operating transnationally to commit their crimes, carry out different forms of trafficking and launder their profits while avoiding detection by moving across several jurisdictions.

I am currently actively engaged in the preparation of an EU Agenda on tackling organised crime, which is part of the Commission Work Programme for this year. It will set out a strategic approach to fight all forms of organised crime including through an active support to law enforcement and focusing on the main threats. Law enforcement operational cooperation in the fight against trafficking in cultural goods already takes place under the framework of the EU policy cycle on organised and serious international crime where it is part of the priority “organised property crime”.

In this context, several important cross-border and multi-disciplinary actions against criminal groups active in the trafficking of cultural goods, which were conducted with the support of Europol, have shown promising results. Moreover, the Commission provides dedicated financial support to a number of projects tackling the illicit trafficking of cultural goods. Most recently, we have published a call to fight organised property crime under the Internal Security Fund – Police’s (ISF-P) Annual Work Programme 2019, which specifically focussed on trafficking in cultural goods.

Furthermore, as you noted in your letter, the Commission’s 2016 Action plan for strengthening the fight against terrorist financing underlined the link between financing of terrorism and trafficking of cultural goods. It referred to how a terrorist organisation used illicit excavations of archaeological sites to obtain cultural goods as a source of income and that this may be a significant source of terrorist income. The link was also highlighted in for example Regulation (EU) 2019/880 that sets out the procedures for the import of cultural goods for the purpose of safeguarding humanity’s cultural heritage and preventing the illicit trade in cultural goods, in particular where such illicit trade could contribute to terrorist financing.

I note your shared view that traceability of illicit cultural goods is needed for a proper functioning of the internal market. I am committed to explore how to improve the online and offline traceability of such cultural goods. In some regards, progress is already underway. For instance, the main objective of the Regulation on the introduction and import of cultural goods adopted in June 2019 was to stop imports in the Union of cultural goods illicitly exported from their country of origin. To ensure its proper implementation, the Commission prepared implementing provisions, including for a centralised electronic system for the Import of Cultural Goods, which will allow the storage and exchange of information between Member States and the necessary import formalities. A general prohibition rule entered indeed into force in

December 2020, providing Member States customs with the legal means to control and act on for shipments which may contain cultural goods illicitly exported from their country of origin.

I am grateful for your contribution which I will take into consideration in the work ahead and look forward to the opportunity to further exchange views on these topics.

Yours faithfully,



Ylva JOHANSSON

CC : Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis

CC : High Representative / Vice-President Josep Borrell

CC: Vice-President Margaritis Schinas

CC: Commissioner Mariya Gabriel

CC: Commissioner Thierry Breton