



Press release

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EU conference on illegal trade in cultural property – Monika Grütters, Minister of State for Culture and the Media says: “Let us resolutely support the cultural and investigating authorities on the ground!”

To start the 7th EU CULTNET meeting, which is being held under the auspices of Germany’s Presidency of the EU Council, numerous relevant stakeholders in the field of cultural property protection from Germany and other EU member states have come together today for a virtual workshop. This digital working meeting will, among other things, present good practices and current projects which support the cultural and investigating authorities in combating the illegal trade in cultural property.

The Minister of State for Culture and the Media, Monika Grütters, said: “With our Act on the Protection of Cultural Property (Kulturgutschutzgesetz, KGSG) in Germany and the other rules at EU level, we have laid down the legal basis for action against illegal trade in cultural property. However, these efforts will come to fruition only if the staff of the cultural and investigating authorities are able in practice to distinguish swiftly and reliably between legally and illegally traded cultural property. We support investigative work on the ground with a view to resolutely addressing the illegal trade in stolen cultural property. Groundbreaking work has already been done, as is apparent from the federally funded projects we are presenting here today as part of the work done during Germany’s Presidency of the EU Council. What we must do now is strengthen this dialogue on tried and tested efforts across Europe and roll out the measures across the board.”



One of the German projects being presented today is NEXUD, the network of expertise in the field of cultural goods in Germany, which is to give the authorities access to scientific expertise so that they can verify the authenticity of ancient and archaeological cultural objects promptly and precisely. On this basis, they can then decide whether to open an investigation or officially seize suspect items.

The NEXUD project is to be implemented in cooperation between the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media and the Cultural Foundation of the Länder.

Furthermore, the AI-based KIKu app was presented, which enables customs and police officers to photograph archaeological items and, using an AI-based deep learning network, to find out automatically what the items' country of origin is and whether they are potentially an illegal import or export, along with other relevant information. The app was developed jointly by the Fraunhofer Institute for Secure Information Technology (SIT) and the software developer cosee GmbH, both headquartered in Darmstadt. The Minister of State for Culture funds the project with up to €500,000 from the resources of the Federal Government's National AI Strategy.

A third project presented was the country information featured on the www.kulturgutschutz-deutschland.de website.

Here, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media provides information on the legal provisions applying to cultural property in (currently) over 100 countries – with special reference to those with a rich historical and archaeological heritage such as Iraq, Egypt or Mexico, plus numerous popular holiday destination countries. This information offers better protection for art dealers and tourists against the risks of potentially buying cultural artefacts illegally and exporting them illegally from foreign countries. The website also provides access to the foreign-language databases of legislation maintained by UNESCO and UNODC.

Following on from the morning's workshop, the members of EU CULTNET will continue the meeting as a restricted online conference until tomorrow.

EU CULTNET is an informal expert network of stakeholders from law enforcement, investigating authorities and experts in the field of cultural goods. It was established by the EU Council in October 2012.

For further details of the KIKu app, see www.sit.fraunhofer.de/de/kiku.