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Contested memories: how local and regional authorities can manage controversial cultural heritage

Committee on Governance, Civic Engagement and the Environment (Governance Committee)

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Summary

This report examines the prominent role of contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage in Europe's historical landscape. Drawing on the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention), Congress reports on cultural heritage and extensive research in memory studies, the report highlights how cultural heritage serves as a pillar of collective identity and can contribute positively to democracy, respect for human rights and inclusive dialogue. At the same time, it underscores that heritage sites can become arenas for polarisation, aggressive nationalism and historical revisionism – particularly in the current context of geopolitical instability, technological change and the rise of disinformation.

Informed by a range of examples – including the management of Nazi and fascist, communist, colonial, genocidal and authoritarian heritage – the report demonstrates that local and regional authorities have important responsibilities and opportunities. They act as primary stewards of public spaces and physical monuments and markers associated with historical or cultural memory. They also have the capacity to foster inclusive community engagement, support plural and critical historical narratives and foster cross-border cooperation. However, their effectiveness depends on supportive legal frameworks, access to networks and funding and coordinated action with national governments and international partners.

The report concludes with targeted recommendations for both local and regional as well as national authorities. All levels of government are encouraged to adopt transparent, participatory and evidence-based approaches to cultural heritage management, as a means of reinforcing democratic values, social cohesion and the shared European commitment to human rights and mutual understanding.

1. L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
EPP/CCE: European People's Party Group in the Congress
SOC/G/PD: Group of Socialists, Greens and Progressive Democrats
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group
ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group
PFE: Patriots for Europe Group
NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress.

RESOLUTION 539 (2026)[2]

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") refers to:

a. the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No.122, "the Charter");

b. the European Cultural Convention (ETS No. 18);

c. the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (ETS No.199), Faro Convention;

d. Congress Resolution 529 (2026) "Congress prioritities 2026-2031";

e. Congress Resolution 474 (2021) and Recommendation 463 (2021) "Culture without borders: Cultural heritage management for local and regional development";

f. Congress Resolution 379 (2015) "Jewish cemeteries: the responsibility of local authorities";

g. Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)1 on the European Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st century;

h. Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2280 (2024) "Countering the erasure of cultural identity in war and peace";

i. Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2149 (2019) "The value of cultural heritage in democratic society";

j. Cultural Routes Programme and Resolution CM/Res(2010)53 establishing an Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes;

k. Council of Europe and European Union European Heritage Days (EHD) Initiative and its 2026 Theme: Heritage at Risk - Revive, Resist, Reimagine.

2. The Congress underlines that:

a. contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage is a structural and dynamic feature of Europe's historical landscape;

b. such legacies are complex and multifaceted, reflected in tangible monuments, sites and place names, as well as in intangible traditions, narratives and collective memories;

c. they are essential for shaping collective identity, fostering democratic dialogue, advancing historical learning and transmitting European values;

d. the ongoing politicisation and instrumentalisation of such heritage demonstrate the urgency for robust and democratic responses;

e. considering their central role in managing contested, conflicting, and forgotten cultural heritage as well as their proximity to communities, local and regional authorities are strategically positioned to facilitate structured, inclusive and participatory dialogue, plural and critical historical narratives, reconciliation and inclusive education.

3. In light of the above, the Congress calls on the local and regional authorities of Council of Europe member States to:

2 Debated and adopted by the Congress on 29 October 2026 (see document CG(2026)51-24, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Keith BROWN, United Kingdom (R, ILDG) and Anita SCHNEIDER, Germany (L, SOC/G/PD).

a. establish advisory and/or consultative mechanisms e.g. public consultations to evaluate and contribute to decision-making on contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage through transparent, participatory and expert-informed processes;

b. ensure that these mechanisms are inclusive of all relevant local stakeholders, including marginalised communities, youth, and civil society;

c. support museums, cultural institutions and programmes that present multiple perspectives and promote critical reflection on the past and challenge simplistic or exclusionary narratives;

d. support schools, universities and youth organisations in providing excursions, courses and interactive resources that engage and inform young people about complex and contested heritage often represented in their communities;

e. engage in cross-border and transregional cooperation especially in borderlands or areas with entangled histories to discuss contested memories and foster reconciliation and mutual understanding;

f. support interdisciplinary research and the sharing of best practices on the management of contested, conflicting, and forgotten cultural heritage;

g. promote heritage tourism that aligns with the broader goals of building social cohesion underpinned by the values of human rights, democracy and civic participation, including participation in the Council of Europe Cultural Routes Programme.

4. The Congress calls on the local and regional authorities and their national associations to take account of this resolution and the accompanying explanatory memorandum, on this specific issue. It also asks its statutory bodies to take the present resolution into account in their activities.

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

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INTRODUCTION[3]

1. The Council of Europe and its Congress of Local and Regional Authorities have long demonstrated their commitment to ensuring that cultural heritage fosters democratic dialogue and respect for human rights as well as promoting tolerance, creativity, and connections across Europe's borders. The Council of Europe Convention Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention, 2005) and subsequent Congress reports on cultural heritage demonstrate that both material and intangible cultural heritage play a vital role in both symbolising and transmitting national, regional and local identity, while also contributing to a broader sense of European belonging.

2. Decades of scholarship in the now well-established field of memory studies have explored the connections between history, collective identity and cultural heritage. Consequently, cultural heritage is an important source of political power. This resource is significant at local and regional levels and is also relevant for state policies and diplomacy. While cultural heritage can be used to celebrate a country or community's past achievements and share traditions with neighbours through tourism and cultural exchange, it can also be exploited to promote aggressive nationalism or parochialism, radicalise political movements, and distort history, thereby undermining the Council of Europe's values.

3. The instrumentalisation of cultural heritage – defined by the United Nations as "the legacy of physical artifacts, traditions, and practices that are passed down through generations within a community – is a particularly sensitive topic in today's unstable global climate, which is increasingly characterised by destructive armed conflicts, rising populist and authoritarian movements, migration crises, and an increasingly partisan media environment.

4. While the concept of cultural heritage as a catalyst for democracy and human rights at local and regional levels has been explored in previous Council of Europe's texts, contested and conflicting cultural heritage (that is to say where the facts or interpretation of that heritage is a source of division between groups) as well as so-called "blind spots" (forgotten memories) have not yet been thoroughly addressed. Given the emotional and political power of contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage, and consequently its potential for instrumentalisation, effective policies are required to ensure it continues to serve as a resource for resilience, social cohesion, and strengthening democracy.

5. Culture, historical memory and cultural heritage are not only about the past but inherently related to political power in the present, hence the need to provide guidelines that take that dynamic into account. The implementation at the subnational level is highly important. That is where there is the greatest possibility of manipulation - but also the opportunity for community-based approaches in dealing with these challenges - not least since local and regional authorities are often responsible for the display, maintenance and protection of sites of historical interest, regardless of whether the subject is local in nature, or who originally commissioned any monument or marker there.

CHAPTER I – CONTESTED, CONFLICTING AND FORGOTTEN MEMORIES

6. The interpretation and understanding of cultural heritage in Europe has undergone significant and ongoing change in the post-Cold War era. On one hand, the end of communism in Eastern Europe enabled meaningful steps toward pluralism, underpinned by open and democratic debate. The opening of state archives, the granting of unprecedented media freedoms, and the capacity to freely discuss the conflicts and undemocratic regimes of the past have all played a positive role in helping people to understand the past and how it is marked and commemorated in their communities. Previously suppressed memories and traumas – such as the genocidal famine (Holodomor) in Ukraine and the Katyn massacres of Poles – have re-emerged and received renewed attention.

7. On the other hand, these political transitions at the end of the 20th century did not mean that every society was immediately capable of civic discussions or shared understanding about the markers of its past. On the contrary, the end of some authoritarian regimes opened the door to ethnic, religious and nationalist conflict, often stemming from polarised interpretations of the past.

3 The report was drafted with the contribution of Professor Vjeran Pavlaković, University of Rijeka, Croatia.

8. The conflict in the former Yugoslavia and the ongoing post-war problems in the successor states is merely one example in Europe. Certainly, the dissolution of this supranational state allowed previously suppressed memories and cultural heritage sites to finally receive proper recognition. However, this occurred during the transition from authoritarianism and before the full implementation of democracy, which led to decades of political instrumentalisation. Historical revanchism across the region resulted in the demonisation of the multi-ethnic Partisan resistance movement and the whitewashing of Axis collaborationist crimes. Nationalist political elites and the various armed groups emerging during the war devastated the cultural heritage related to Yugoslav antifascism (monuments, memorial museums and other historical sites were blown up, vandalised, removed, or transformed) and weaponised the contested heritage of the Second World War. Sites associated with victims of communism (Teharje in Slovenia, Jazovka in Croatia, and Široki Brijeg in Bosnia and Herzegovina) or anti-communist resistance (Ravna Gora in Serbia) were instrumentalised for violent nation-building agendas.

9. The disintegration of supranational states and communist regimes, often accompanied by violence, has left a considerable amount of contested history unresolved.

10. Of course, disputes about cultural memory and heritage are not confined to those states that experienced communism. The same is true of many other countries and communities, including those with fascist or authoritarian pasts. A well-document surge of extreme nationalist and populist sentiment over recent years places even greater symbolic importance on the physical markers of cultural memory.

11. Added to this is the very different but contemporary phenomenon of post-imperial historic reckoning. In those European countries with a history of empire, there are often deep divisions in the population's understanding or views of historical events. When these events, or the people involved, are commemorated in physical form, careful and considered handling is often required.

12. These dynamics are not confined to the national level - they are often most visible within local and regional contexts, where collective memory, monuments, and community identities intersect. In many towns and regions, competing narratives of the past are embedded in everyday spaces – museums, memorials, street names, and local commemorations – frequently capturing a localised aspect of national or international history or politics. Often these markers reflect contested versions of the past.

13. There is a need to develop strategies that empower local and regional authorities to engage with this contested cultural heritage in constructive ways, using it to promote European values rather than as spaces for political polarisation or exclusion. One approach to dealing with the legacy of a traumatic past has been the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission (TRC), epitomised by the restorative justice process in South Africa (1996-2002).

14. In Europe, there have been a few similar commissions established (Germany, Romania) or proposed (RECOM in the former Yugoslavia), with varying degrees of perceived success. Notably, the German parliamentary commission (Enquete-Kommission) sought to address the communist past through inclusive dialogue, involving many parts of society, while the Romanian commission, known as the "Tismăneanu Commission", also addressed that era of the country's past.

15. More broadly, the historical complexity of the Council of Europe's member states and the generally strong democratic tradition means that local and regional authorities are often better placed to address contested cultural heritage issues and practicalities than relying on the imposition of a national TRC.

16. Scholars use the terms dissonant, negative, or difficult heritage to describe cultural heritage associated with trauma, violence, or atrocity.[4] Some experts argue that all heritage is inherently contested, since monuments and heritage sites are perceived differently by historical winners and losers in any society. Others focus on the material legacies of undemocratic regimes and what to do with them. The immediate state response to negative heritage, for example after the Second World War or the fall of communism, is often to erase all symbols of the former regime in public space, such as monuments, street names, cemeteries, memorial parks, and other physical traces. However, cultural heritage also includes architecture, reappropriated historical sites and commemorative practices, requiring more

4 Tunbridge, J.E., & Ashworth, G.J. (1996). *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict*. John Wiley & Sons.
Macdonald, S. (2008). *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond*. Routledge.
Logan, W., & Reeves, K. (Eds.). (2008). *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with 'Difficult Heritage'*. Routledge.

comprehensive and nuanced approaches in which local and regional authorities can play a decisive role.

17. Categorising contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage is essential for manging it through strategies developed at the local and regional levels, as part of a multilevel governance approach.[5] Historically, these categories include, in the order that they have emerged in public debate:

- **Nazi and fascist heritage**

18. Despite extensive de-Nazification and de fascistisation after the Second World War, traces of these regimes remain visible and are sometimes appropriated by contemporary extremist movements. While architecture plays a prominent role in the fascist legacy in Italy, post-communist countries in Southeastern Europe and the Baltics experienced an explosion of heritage sites associated with Axis collaborationists since 1989.

19. Although antifascism is enshrined in the Croatian Constitution, various local and regional authorities rehabilitated member of the Ustasha movement and erected monuments and memorial plaques dedicated to collaborationist forces, who are often described as victims of communism rather than fallen Axis soldiers. Similar monuments to other Nazi and Italian fascist collaborators can be found in Slovenia (White Guard/Bela Garda), Serbia (Chetniks, including Draža Mihailović), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Handžar Division supporters such as Mustafa Busuladžić), and Kosovo* (Balli Kombetar), although they are frequently characterised as anti-communist fighters or victims without contextualising their involvement as perpetrators. The contested heritage in the former Yugoslavia is further complicated by the wars of the 1990s, since symbols and memory politics of the Second World War were used by the various warring sides as propaganda and mobilisation tactics.

20. Although revisionism regarding anti-communist movements is not as extensive in the Baltics as in Southeastern Europe, there have been examples of memorialising units that fought on the side of the Third Reich. For example, the Lihula Monument commemorates Estonians who fought against the Soviet Union during the Second World War. Unveiled initially in Pärnu in 2002, the monument was met with condemnation from Prime Minister Siim Kallas and concerns from other organisations over its possible glorification of the Nazi regime. Controversy stems from the statue's dedication to those who served in the Wehrmacht, specifically the Waffen-SS. Shortly after it was unveiled in 2002, the statue was taken down, only to be unveiled again in Lihula in 2004. In 2005, the statue was eventually relocated to the privately owned Museum of Fight for Estonia’s Freedom and has not been moved since.

- **Communist heritage**

21. The collapse of communist regimes across Eastern Europe followed diverse trajectories, shaped by differing experiences of occupation, domestic resistance and state socialism. These variations influenced how societies addressed communist-era heritage, from memorial museums dedicated to addressing communist repression to the removal or reappropriation of monuments.

22. Many cities in former communist countries established memorial museums in former secret police headquarters (Terror Háza in Budapest, Hohenschönhausen Memorial in Berlin, the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights in Vilnius), which exposed the architecture of repression to the newly democratic societies, but were also subject to political manipulation in the present.

23. Monuments and statues represent some of the most visible markers of ideology, national identity and territorial borders, and are therefore among the most prominent and important examples of cultural heritage in times of political transition. Post-communist authorities destroyed, removed, or reappropriated thousands of monuments such the *Spomeniks* in the former Yugoslavia and Red Army monuments in Poland.

5 A series of cases from Europe and beyond are available through the Contested Histories project, coordinated by EuroClio – European Association of History Educators, which illustrates how contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage is subject to instrumentalisation or manipulation.

24. Local initiatives in Tallinn (Soviet Statue Graveyard near the Maarjamäe memorial complex), Budapest (Memento Park), and Sofia (Museum of the Art from the Socialist Period) have resulted in the preservation of this monumental heritage rather than allowing it to be destroyed. While Tallinn's statue graveyard now effectively functions as an outdoor museum, the city's Bronze Soldier monument sparked more controversies due to its use as a gathering place for pro-Russian protestors and the mobilisation of various Estonian political parties seeking to remove it. It ultimately involved a legal struggle between the city of Tallinn and the national government before it was finally moved from the centre of the city to a cemetery on the urban periphery.

25. In other cases, such as the Green Bridge (Žaliasis tiltas) in Vilnius, Lithuania, explanatory plaques have been added to the Soviet sculptures describing the authoritarian nature of the communist period. While large-scale destruction of this heritage risks erasing significant artistic and historical layers (such as in the former Yugoslavia, Poland, and the Baltic countries), initiatives such as monument parks in Tallinn, Budapest and Sofia show how contested heritage can be removed from public space yet be preserved for educational and interpretative purposes.

- **Other forms of authoritarianism**

26. Authoritarianism in other, specific guises has also brought up difficult questions relating to the cultural legacy it leaves.

27. One recent, ongoing and particularly imposing example is the large cross and basilica erected during Francisco Franco's dictatorship at the Valley of the Fallen *(Valle de los Caídos)* near Madrid. Falsely claimed to represent reconciliation after the Spanish Civil War due to the interment of the remains of both Republicans and Nationalists, it was ultimately a symbol of Francoism and a pilgrimage site for those visiting the graves of Franco and José Antonio Primo de Rivera (the founder of the fascist Falange movement).

28. Spain's Law on Historical Memory (2007) was intended to regulate the removal of Francoist symbols from public space, such as monuments, street names, and sited of memory. This also resulted in the erection of new sites of memory to the victims of Francoism, such as the 2014 monumental pyramid in Malaga's San Rafael cemetery and the Exile Memorial Museum (MUME – Museu Memorial de l'Exili) in La Jonquera.

29. The exhumation of Franco (2019) and Primo de Rivera (2023), as well as the renaming of the site to the Valley of Cuelgamuros (*Valle de Cuelgamuros*), preserved the site while removing some of the most controversial political aspects that had for decades epitomised the regime for many of Franco's opponents.

30. Alongside the legal framework at the national level, local and regional authorities have responsibilities at the municipal level, and they are confronted with multiple challenges in implementing historical commemoration. For example, exhibits in the military museum in Seville still portray General Gonzalo Queipo de Llano, responsible for mass repression and executions in Andalusia, in a heroic light.

- **Colonialism and slavery**

31. Colonial legacies and slavery remain among Europe's most persistent memory blind spots. Monuments celebrating imperial expansion or individuals involved in colonial exploitation have increasingly been questioned by local communities, and in some cases, been attacked by the public. However, in many cities monuments that celebrate the exploration that led to exploitation (including Lisbon's Monument to the Discoveries (*Padrão dos Descobrimentos*), or glorify individuals who profited from coercive labour systems and racial domination (such as the statue of Cecil Rhodes in Oxford, statues of Leopold II in Belgium, the monument to Columbus in Barcelona) remain prominently displayed without context or reflection.

32. The establishment of the Slave Market Museum in Lagos, Portugal, in 2010 can on one hand be seen as a positive development in a country that has limited public acknowledgment of the history of

enslaved people in the country. On the other hand, visitors and scholars have criticised the museum's narrative and the process of its creation. The Lagos municipal council founded the museum following the excavation of bodies from the actual site of the slave market nearby in 2009. Despite revealing the city's dark past, the museum's critics point out that the legacy of the slave trade is portrayed exclusively as a part of history, and that no persons of Afro-heritage were engaged with the decision-making around the museum. Furthermore, colonial-era monuments remain in place nearby (such as a statue of Henry the Navigator) while there are no memorials yet to the enslaved people whose remains were unearthed at Vale da Gafaria.

33. In addition to these time-specific categories, there are also thematic types of heritage and collective memory that should be addressed, including:

- **Genocide and mass violence**

34. Genocide represents the most extreme form of state-sponsored violence, and debates surrounding its recognition are often deeply divisive. While Holocaust remembrance has become a cornerstone of European memory, other genocides remain contested. The recognition of the genocide in Srebrenica is not universal in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the preservation of the Dutch peacekeeping base at Potočari and its transformation into a memorial museum complex, with considerable international support, has enabled the survivors of Srebrenica to combat denialism.

35. The Memorial Centre Srebrenica (*Memorijalni Centar Srebrenica*) has succeeded in presenting the narrative of the 1990s war in the former Yugoslavia to the global community, despite a policy of denial by political elites in the Republika Srpska entity and is a testament to the resilience of the local community. Srebrenica, however, remains a contested cultural heritage site not only on the state level of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but at the local level.

36. In 2020, the mayor erected a so-called "monument of peace" in the centre of the town with no reference to the murder and expulsion of the Bosniak population in 1995. This initiative excluded important social actors (such as the Association of Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa) and other members of the community who were not part of the decision-making process in erecting the statue.

- **Absent and forgotten heritage**

37. In addition to contested sites, many societies face the challenge of absent or forgotten heritage, resulting in events or groups being omitted from dominant memory narratives. Local and regional authorities have often been central to recovering such histories.

38. For example, the Flossenbürg Concentration Camp Memorial (Germany) took decades to establish as a proper memorial site since the location was used for post-war refugees and displaced persons as well as commercial activities in the abandoned buildings. Starting in the late 1950s, construction began on a housing development on the former camp site that reduced the memorial site to a cemetery and a few small monuments. The remains of the Nazi concentration camp were unwanted heritage, but the persistence of survivors, local activists and post-Cold War memory politics pushed the local and regional authorities to adopt a new approach to this contested site.

39. In 1996, the municipality of Flossenbürg established the first documentation centre that resulted in this forgotten site becoming a distinguished place of remembrance. Over the next two decades, the local authorities and the regional Bavarian government worked to restore the memorial site and create several permanent exhibitions, eventually coordinating research and educational programs with the University of Regensburg (the Centre for Commemorative Culture, *Zentrum Erinnerungskultur*, was established in 2020). The intervention of local and regional authorities will enable the future expansion of the memorial site to the nearby quarry, which was part of the camp's wartime slave economy and post-war commercial exploitation, demonstrating the importance of memory activism at this level.

- **Remembrance tourism, dark tourism and its economic dimensions**

40. Beyond political, social and educational considerations, contested and forgotten heritage also has economic implications. Sites associated with violence and repression increasingly attract visitors, giving rise to new forms of tourism. Known as dark tourism, war tourism or remembrance tourism, this relatively new field of study explores the intersection of commodification and memorialisation at sites related to violence, tragedy, and death. This can be commemorative and respectful or it can attract those who are attracted to extremist legacies: again, this is about contested views of the past.

41. Visitor data from the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial[6] and other Holocaust sites indicates a dramatic increase in interest in this kind of museum between the early 2000s (when nearly 500,000 individuals visited Auschwitz) and 2019 (the peak before COVID-19, when over 2.3 million people visited the camp memorial). Former political prisons, such as Mokotów (the location of the Museum of Cursed Soldiers and Political Prisoners of the Polish People's Republic in Warsaw, Poland), La Model (Barcelona, Spain), and Kilmainham Gaol (Dublin, Ireland) are just a few examples of the rise of "tourists" visits to sites of incarceration, which not only tell the stories of prison life but also figure prominently in national narratives. Battlefield sites, from Gallipoli (Türkiye) and the Ebro Battlefield (Spain) to the Liberation Route across Western Europe, present visitors with numerous monuments, interpretation centres and traces of war such as trenches, discarded war materiel, and ruined buildings. Rather than a single site, this form of (dark) war tourism includes numerous stops, and increases the potential for local and regional businesses to profit from visitors interested in these kinds of historical locations.

42. These former camps, prisons and battlefields across Europe present both opportunities and ethical risks. The birthplace and burial site of Benito Mussolini in Predappio, Italy, epitomises the challenges facing local authorities when contested heritage raises ethical issues but functions as an important boost to the economy. Mussolini's tomb attracts an estimated 100,000 visitors per year, and fuels souvenir shops with fascist-inspired objects, hospitality services, restaurants, and other tourism-related spending. The site undoubtedly attracts radical right visitors in addition to history enthusiasts, particularly during anniversaries related to the fascist regime such as the March on Rome or Mussolini's birthday. Some local authorities in the past have understood the importance to the economy but sought to balance the glorification of the fascist period by suggesting the building of an educational memorial centre. However, because of a change in political leadership, this did not proceed.

43. A similar challenge faced the municipal authorities in Bleiburg, Austria, which had for decades functioned as a pilgrimage site for Croats commemorating Yugoslav communist repression. The village was the site where the collaborationist Ustasha forces surrendered to the British Army in May 1945, before being handed over to Tito's Partisans. The victorious Partisan forces exacted a brutal revenge on the defeated collaborators, killing tens of thousands in executions and death marches while imprisoning many others. Bleiburg was an important site during communism when victims of communist repression could not be publicly mourned in Tito's Yugoslavia, but after the Cold War the commemorations increasingly took on the characteristics of radical right celebrations. Local authorities, themselves aware of the complexities of post-war suffering and depredations, tolerated the annual commemoration and the economic boost it brought despite the problematic content of the remembrance practices. The Austrian government's banning of Ustasha symbols, the Austrian Catholic Church's strict regulation of the commemoration, and the border closures during COVID-19 essentially resolved the local community's dilemma, but for many years Bleiburg was one of the most cited examples of contested heritage.

44. These categories and examples underline that contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage is not a marginal or exceptional phenomenon, but a structural feature of Europe's historical landscape. How such heritage is managed, particularly by local and regional authorities, has significant implications for democratic culture, social cohesion and the transmission of shared European values.

6 See https://www.auschwitz.org/en/

CHAPTER II – THE CURRENT CONTEXT

45. The complex geopolitical environment has made dealing with the past and contested histories both more important and more challenging. Economic crises, increased migration and social inequalities are among the factors that may have contributed to the surge in political extremism over recent years, which has itself led to democratic backsliding in parts of Europe. Digital technology also has an increasing impact on how historical memory is perceived and amplified and addressed and managed. This is important context for policy-making to develop more resilient tools for local and regional leaders.

46. Key challenges include:

- **Populism and radicalisation**

47. Across Europe there has been an increase in populist parties and politicians claiming to offer simple solutions to complex problems. Often, populist messages are accompanied by historical revisionism of the post- Second World War liberal order, which is underpinned by acceptance of democratic values.

- **(Social) media**

48. The pluralisation of the media landscape has meant the decline of traditional media as "gatekeepers" of information. While this has enabled previously marginalised voices to have a greater chance of being heard, it has made it much harder for consumers of news to discern what is reliable information and what is disinformation.

- **Post-truth global conditions**

49. Trends towards relativising historical facts, treating every interpretation of history and equally valid seeing history from an ideological perspective means that a coherent, transparent, and evidence-based approach is needed more than ever for dealing with contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage. The rapid emergence of Artificial Intelligence in all aspects of communication, research, and analysis is an additional factor that makes critical thinking skills even more valuable for decision-making and public policy decisions.

- **Destruction and removal**

50. In light of all this, there is an increased risk that decisions regarding contested heritage are made on the basis of incomplete information and problematic media campaigns. This can result in the destruction, removal and closure of precarious cultural heritage sites, or the promotion and spread of disinformation about sites that do not serve educational purposes but are instrumentalised for political goals.

51. All of these challenges further heighten the role of local and regional authorities. Their knowledge and experience of the situation on the ground knowledge and their competences are central to dealing effectively with contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage within their communities.

CHAPTER III – ROLE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

52. Although many of the contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage sites are mobilised for collective memory and policy at the national level, local and regional actors in Council of Europe member states have an important role to play because of their direct institutional responsibility for the public space and the proximity to local communities.

53. **Local and regional authorities are primarily responsible for the management and transformation of public space. These authorities have** decision-making powers over monuments,

street names and commemorations. Such powers include commissioning, licencing, funding, and long-term maintenance. Subnational authorities also often have the powers to modify, remove, or re-evaluate heritage sites, ultimately shaping the symbolic landscape at the local and regional level.

54. The Italian city of Bolzano/Bozen offers several examples of how local and regional authorities can deal with negative fascist heritage. The city, which has an influential German minority, appointed a commission to determine what to do with a large fascist victory monument erected during Mussolini's dictatorship. This period was characterised by forced Italianisation and the suppression of minority languages, cultures, and identities. The fascist ideology was also embodied in the architecture promoted by the regime. Rather than pursue a costly and destructive removal strategy, the commission transformed the once-fascist memorial into an educational museum that challenges authoritarian memory politics.

55. Furthermore, Bolzano's State Financial Offices (formerly the Casa del Fascio) features a bas-relief depicting Mussolini's rise to power and imperialist conquests. Instead of erasing this architectural heritage, the city implemented an innovative solution by superimposing Hannah Arendt's quote (in Italian, German, and Ladin) – "No one has the right to obey" – over the bas-relief, thus directly countering the fascist regime's efforts to impose obedience through oppression.

56. **Local and regional authorities can act as facilitators of structured, community-based dialogue on contested and dissonant heritage.** By organising inclusive consultation processes, they can create deliberative spaces that are less exposed to polarisation driven by national politics or media attention.

57. The example of Bristol's Edward Colston statue, toppled by anti-racist protestors in 2020, demonstrates how a local community can engage with contested heritage. Rather than restoring or destroying the statue to Colston, a key figure of the Atlantic slave trade, Marvin Reeves, the mayor of Bristol, established the "We Are Bristol" History Commission in September 2020. The commission was comprised of an independent group of professional academics and historians that had the support of the local authorities but were given freedom and the ability to work without the constant pressure of media or politics. The commission also engaged with the public, of whom nearly 14,000 completed a survey that asked citizens their opinion on what to do with the controversial statue. Based on the commission's report, published in 2022, the local authorities ultimately decided to create an exhibition of the fallen statue at the M Shed Museum. There, the statue now functions as an educational tool for learning about the history of slavery as well as the social history of protest movements.

58. The Chicago Monument Project (CMP) in the United States is also an example that, while not based in the European context, can illustrate how dialogue at the community level can inspire a reflection on the many examples of contested heritage in the city that became flashpoints during the Black Lives Matter protests and after the murder of George Floyd. The CMP Advisory Committee was composed of thirty community leaders, artists, architects, scholars, curators, and city officials who initially reviewed over 500 monuments and public artworks and eventually focused on forty-one sites in the final report. Rejecting top-down decisions for removing or building monuments, the report argues the importance of community engagement, sensitivity to marginalised groups and minorities, greater contextualisation of existing monuments, the need for extensive educational outreach, and the implementation of a transparent process in the erection of new monuments that represent blind spots or absent memory.

59. **Local and regional authorities can support plural and critical interpretations of heritage through local cultural institutions.** By funding and mandating museums, archives and cultural centres, subnational authorities can encourage the presentation of multiple perspectives instead of a single dominant narrative.

60. The previously mentioned example of the Colston statue in Bristol illustrates how a local museum can create an exhibition that is controversial but ultimately engages the public and activates their critical thinking skills. One of the core insights from the Bristol example is that the mayor initiated the commission on what to do with the statue and funded the public opinion surveys but ensured that the media and public were not influencing or pressuring the process until the final recommendations were released.

61. **Local and regional authorities can strengthen decision-making through cooperation with academic and expert partners.** Such partnerships provide historical, social and comparative perspectives that support informed and context-sensitive choices, while also enhancing community engagement. International expertise, where appropriate, can complement local knowledge without displacing it. Impactful strategies can include cross-border cooperation, where this is relevant and a vigorous engagement through education.

CHAPTER IV – STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH CONTESTED AND CONFLICTING CULTURAL HERITAGE

62. Strategies for dealing with contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage should engage with the difficult past in an open and democratic manner. This helps to prevent the instrumentalisation of sites. This task is challenging since illiberal actors seek to undermine deliberative processes for polarising or destabilising purposes. The values, conventions and recommendations of the Council of Europe make clear the importance of broad community participation, transparency and education in the governance of cultural heritage, with an emphasis on the role of local and regional authorities.[7]

- Inclusive decision-making

63. Local and regional authorities play a central role in ensuring that decision-making processes concerning contested heritage are conducted in a democratic, transparent and participatory manner. Conversely, in many Council of Europe member states, decisions regarding monuments and memorials were historically imposed in a top-down manner by political authorities, especially those with authoritarian pasts. Addressing this legacy requires a shift towards bottom-up participation, supported by educators, experts and civil society actors at the local and, where appropriate, national and European levels in a multilevel governance approach. When local and regional authorities actively support such inclusive processes, they contribute to the promotion of democratic values, tolerance and dialogue within their communities.

64. For example, in 2022, the City of Edinburgh Council in Scotland funded the independent Edinburgh Slavery and Colonialism Legacy Review in response to the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020. The report, led by Scotland's first Black professor Sir Geoff Palmer, made a number of recommendations about Edinburgh's cultural heritage and public space connected to colonialism. These recommendations included creating a touring exhibition on diversity, coordinating a digital campaign around UNESCO's Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition, hosting a Decolonising Edinburgh conference, and piloting anti-racist learning resources for schools. This was only the first step, since these suggestions required considerable funding for implementation. Last year £239,746 (around 277,000 euros) were awarded from the UK's national lottery to carry out these recommendations, demonstrating the collaboration between national funding, independent scholarship, and local administration.

65. By establishing clear procedures for consultation and deliberation, subnational authorities can thus reduce the risk that debates around heritage sites become dominated by national-level political agendas or media-driven polarisation. Coordinated outreach activities involving schools, universities, cultural institutions, NGOs and European-funded initiatives are particularly important in this regard. Such coordination helps ensure that discussions are grounded in historical knowledge, ethical reflection and respect for diversity, rather than driven by short-term political mobilisation.

- Youth engagement and education

66. Education is a cornerstone of sustainable strategies for dealing with contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage. Local and regional authorities can play a decisive role by supporting educational institutions (including regional universities and research institutions) and initiatives that engage young people with difficult pasts through critical, reflective and participatory approaches.

7 See the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (ETS No.199), Faro Convention and Congress Resolution 474(2021) and Recommendation 463 (2021) "Culture without borders: Cultural heritage management for local and regional development".

Contrary to common stereotypes, younger generations show strong interest in history and cultural heritage when they are given meaningful opportunities to engage with complex and sensitive issues in supportive learning environments. Student excursions to cultural heritage sites have resulted in a noticeable increase in engagement and follow-up participatory activities of young people in key issues facing their communities, which were perhaps intangible prior to these activities.

67. Authorities can facilitate this engagement by encouraging cooperation between schools, universities, museums and NGOs, and by providing political and institutional support for educators who address sensitive historical topics that may provoke public controversy. The development and dissemination of educational materials designed specifically for dealing with contested pasts is another key area where local and regional support is essential. For example, the funding of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) enabled cooperation between the Universities of Rijeka (Croatia) and Regensburg (Germany) to organise excursions in the Northern Adriatic region that covered multiple countries (Croatia, Slovenia, Italy), dealt with the contested heritage of multiple conflicts (the First and Second World Wars, the Balkan Wars of the 1990s), and resulted in an online interactive map and other publications. Bringing students to contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage is challenging because of the emotional power inherent in many of these sites. There must be extensive preparation prior to the excursion for both students and professors, proper behaviour at the sites due to their symbolic significance and traumatic nature, and guided discussions afterwards.

68. The Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR) based in Nicosia, Cyprus, is one of the most innovative organisations working on developing critical thinking skills and advancing historical dialogues in a divided society. The educational materials produced by AHDR and the work of its educators (literally on the border between the Cypriot and Turkish sides of the island) can serve as an inspiration for many other teachers. Other international associations such as Euroclio – European Association of History Educators, have extensive archives, textbooks, and teaching materials designed specifically for these kinds of topics. While the emphasis here has mostly been on local and regional levels, the role of national textbook commissions (such as those established between Germany and France, Germany and Poland, and Italy and Slovenia) can also impact educational outputs and curricula, particularly in borderland areas.

- **Acknowledging Forgotten and Absent Heritage**

69. Local and regional authority strategies have the capacity to bring to light previously marginalised, ignored, or deliberately covered up contested heritage. This too can strengthen cohesion and democratic resilience.

70. Victims of the Roma Holocaust (genocide of the Roma and Sinti) have long been absent from many European commemorative practices, but due to education initiatives, increased funding of remembrance activities, and a strengthening of European Roma networks, this forgotten chapter of the Second World War is receiving the recognition it deserves. While many concentration camp memorial museums did mention Roma and Sinti victims, specific memorials to their suffering or the camps where they were interned and murdered were not explicitly commemorated.

71. The site of the Lety Concentration Camp near Prague (Czechia) was used as a pig farm in the decades after it had been a place of internment and murder of the Roma. After many years of efforts by Roma activists and historians, the destruction of the pig farm began in 2022 and the location will be managed as a heritage site by the Museum of Romani Culture. The successful initiative to gain recognition for the Lety camp illustrates how local and regional authorities used transnational networks, partnered with NGOs and scholars, and embarked on educational projects that are now enabling the proper memorialisation of this contested site.

- **Supporting transborder and transregional cooperation**

72. Cross-border and transregional cooperation represents one of the most effective strategies for addressing contested heritage, particularly in border regions shaped by histories of conflict, shifting borders and population movements. Local and regional authorities are well placed to initiate and sustain such cooperation, which can counter nationalist narratives by highlighting shared, entangled and plural

histories. Borderlands and the memory politics associated with them have often been instrumentalised by nationalist politicians, but a strategy of cooperation can be used instead to help ensure that multiple perspectives are taken into account, in line with the Council of Europe's approach to teaching and the broader protection of democracy.

73. Examples such as the Lipa Remembers (*Lipa pamti*) Memorial Centre in Croatia (Croatian-Slovenian-Italian borderland), the Camp de Rivesaltes Memorial in France (French-Spanish borderland), and initiatives within the Euroregion Egrensis (Czech-German borderland) illustrate how contested heritage sites can be transformed into spaces of dialogue, education and reconciliation. In these cases, local and regional authorities played a crucial role in preservation, institutional support, educational programming and cross-border engagement, demonstrating that difficult pasts need not fuel interethnic hostility but can instead strengthen democratic and cooperative relations.

74. Specifically, the Lipa Remembers Museum in Croatia honours the memory of the village of Lipa, destroyed in 1944 by Wermacht soldiers and Italian fascist militias during anti-Partisan operations. The event is memorialised in a museum, several monuments and the preserved ruins of the burned buildings, similar to memorial sites in Lidice (Czechia) and Oradour-sur-Glane (France). Renovated in 2015, the museum engages local schools, innovative artists who hold annual events in the public space around the permanent exhibition building, and visitors from neighbouring Italy and Slovenia, particularly during the yearly commemoration. Rather than fuelling inter-ethnic hatred, the memory of this tragedy is used to strengthen community values and build positive relations with bordering countries.

75. Another border area memorial museum is the Camp de Rivesaltes Memorial (Memorial du camp de Rivesaltes) in southern France. This camp held refugees during the Spanish Civil War, was an internment camp during the Vichy Regime, and functioned as a camp for displaced Harkis during the war in Algeria. It therefore possesses multiple layers of dark and traumatic history. This site was saved from oblivion after the accidental discovery of archival materials in Perpignan and the efforts of local authorities who made the preservation of the site a national issue. The memorial museum was inaugurated in 2015 and represents the entangled histories of several Mediterranean countries (France, Spain, Algeria) and different religious communities (Christianity, Judaism, Islam), as well as functioning as an educational centre that continues the important dialogue about the past and future.

76. The border region between Bavaria (Germany) and Western Bohemia (Czechia) was long an emblematic example of contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage due to the legacy of the Sudetenland and the Cold War. However, many successful cross-border initiatives have been created there, including Euroregion Egrensis, which promotes tourism, cultural heritage, environmental protection, and civic exchange.

77. Other borderland regions with difficult pasts (Alsace-Lorraine, Schleswig–Holstein, the Polish-Ukrainian border) have various levels of success in addressing contested cultural heritage in order to improve relations with neighbouring countries, including as a means to counter the most entrenched nationalist narratives.

- **Building institutional capacity through funding, projects and networks**

78. Local and regional authorities can further strengthen their capacity to address contested heritage by engaging with European and international funding schemes, research networks and cooperation frameworks. As project-based work becomes increasingly common across the cultural heritage sector, authorities, educators, heritage professionals and civil society actors require skills in project development, management and knowledge transfer.

79. Participation in programmes such as Interreg, European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) Actions, and European Union remembrance funding initiatives (CERV, EU Remembrance) enables local and regional actors to exchange best practices, develop innovative approaches and connect scholarly research with public outreach. The projects conducted and coordinated by Euroclio, such as Contested Histories, demonstrates the public outreach that is possible through the funding of scholars utilising digital humanities tools.

80. The European Commission's European Education and Culture Executive Agency has funded many EU remembrance projects that encourage research on contested cultural heritage precisely through the strategies mentioned above (cross-border cooperation, engagement with students, collaboration between local authorities and civil society). Interreg projects are even more geared towards local and regional communities in developing economic activities, fostering tourism, and preserving cultural heritage.

81. Another EU-level mechanism that fosters multinational cooperation and networking is the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) framework. COST Actions, such as "In Search of Transcultural Memory in Europe" (IS1203) and "Slow Memory" (CA20105), fund vibrant exchange between researchers in forty-one member states, encourage participation from so-called Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITCs),[8] and insist on scholarship that includes outreach to stakeholders, local communities, and students. COST projects require tangible results beyond academic publications, although these are also critical to establish evidence-based scientific materials that can be used by a broad spectrum of public institutions. In addition to edited volumes and special issues, the Slow Memory COST Action prepared educational materials, an online artistic platform addressing contested sites of memory, and strengthened partnerships with key stakeholders across Europe, such as the NGO Documenta (Croatia), the community-based heritage initiative MEMO (Memory, Erasure, Monument) on the Isle of Portland (UK), and the Ulster Museum in Belfast (Northern Ireland, UK).

82. Perhaps most relevant to fostering a convergence of scholarship and politics are the policy brief training schools organised within the scope of the COST Action and implemented during one of the project's activities in Tirana, Albania. The ultimate cost of Albanian silence over the contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage of the 20th century (the authoritarian rule of Zog I, Italian fascist occupation, Enver Hoxha's brutal communist dictatorship, and the collapse of state control in the 1990s) is that the physical traces could be erased as the country adopts rapid modernisation policies and dramatic transformations of urban spaces in Tirana, Durres, and other cities. Local and regional authorities can recognise, preserve, and engage citizens in discussions about the cultural heritage related to the dark episodes of the nation's history in order to prevent the destruction of fascist- and socialist-era buildings, former prisons and monuments in the current rush to transform Albanian cityscapes. Restrictive laws on exhuming the victims of the former regimes and a lack of funding have prevented the creation of memorial museums at places such as Spaç Prison in northern Albania, although educational workshops and artistic interventions connecting local authorities, Albanian NGOs and international projects such as COST Actions raise awareness of the importance in preserving this heritage.

83. Engagement with European networks such as the Faro Convention community, Europa Nostra, the European Heritage Label and projects focused on contested histories in public space allows subnational authorities to situate local challenges within a broader European framework and to benefit from comparative perspectives. Participation in these activities strengthens the competencies of local authorities for future project management tasks, while civil society activists and academics can obtain funding for research and outreach programmes.

84. The Walk of Peace along the former First World War frontline near the Slovenian-Italian border illustrates how cross-border cooperation through European projects, careful interpretation and strong local governance can balance commemoration, education, natural heritage and sustainable tourism without glorifying violence or undermining community sensitivities. The Walk of Peace foundation was established in 2000, and along with support from the Slovenian government the project was developed with Interreg funds to incorporate both Italian and Slovenian (and more broadly Austro-Hungarian) perspectives. The memorials, ossuaries, cemeteries, trenches, and war detritus are part of a series of hikes, walks, climbs, and drives that are interwoven with the natural beauty of the high mountain valley. It was developed in cooperation with numerous municipalities on both sides of the border. Rather than a celebration of war, the well-developed interpretative infrastructure reflects on the need for peace while

8 Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITCs) refers to EU Member States and Horizon Europe Associated Countries within the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) framework that have had lower levels of participation in European research and innovation programmes. The designation is intended to promote balanced geographical participation and research capacity-building across Europe by encouraging involvement of institutions and researchers from these countries in COST Actions.

not turning a blind eye to the human suffering that took place here during the First World War but also in the following decades when fascist and communist regimes fought over the territory.

85. The central museum in Kobarid was established in 1990 but has become a central part of the entire Walk of Peace project, incorporating multiple perspectives and focusing on the human side of the conflict regardless of the national identity of the soldiers that fought here. The ethnic conflicts of the past are superseded by the need of preserving the common natural and cultural heritage of this borderland region, which is conveyed precisely through the traces of war and violence. Visitors who come to the region are perhaps attracted by the historical significance but also participate in traditional tourist activities such as enjoying the natural beauty, sampling the traditional foods, and trying the wine from the region on both sides of the border. The universities of the Alps-Adriatic region (Klagenfurt, Udine, Ljubljana and Rijeka) have organised educational excursions and multilingual summer schools in Bovec for years that in addition to language training include lectures on the contested history of the region. Interestingly, contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage can play a much different role for foreign tourists who visit these sites than for the communities that “live” with them, since outside visitors are perhaps unaware of local issues or controversies that affect local perceptions. But the Walk of Peace successfully offers remembrance tourism to communities on both sides of the border as well as the many international visitors who spend time in the Soča Valley.

- **Managing heritage tourism and cultural routes**

86. While education, dialogue and democratic governance remain primary objectives, strategies addressing contested heritage can also contribute to sustainable cultural tourism and the development of cultural heritage routes. Such initiatives, however, raise ethical questions and require careful regulation. Local and regional authorities are responsible for ensuring that tourism development does not minimalise suffering, instrumentalise the past or undermine the dignity of victims. Illiberal memory actors can engage in revanchism or denial of historical crimes, so the regulated preservation of contested or forgotten cultural heritage is vital in combating these trends.

87. Experiences from across Europe demonstrate that clear regulations, professional training and close cooperation with local communities are essential for balancing educational, commemorative and economic objectives. Initiatives such as the European Route of Jewish Heritage and the Liberation Route Europe of the Council of Europe Cultural Routes show how transnational routes can address traumatic histories in a responsible and inclusive manner. In contrast examples of failed and contested initiatives, such as some Second World War Monuments of the Western Balkans, highlight the risks of neglecting local sensitivities and unresolved historical conflicts.

88. These strategies demonstrate that local and regional authorities possess a wide range of tools to address contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage in constructive and democratic ways. By coordinating inclusive governance processes, supporting education and youth engagement, fostering cross-border cooperation, building institutional capacity and regulating heritage tourism responsibly, they can transform sites of tension into spaces of dialogue, learning and shared reflection. Universities, cultural institutions, NGOs and grassroots initiatives are essential partners in this process, but the active engagement and leadership of local and regional authorities remain indispensable for ensuring that Europe’s difficult pasts contribute to democratic resilience rather than division.

- **Art Interventions Addressing Contested Cultural Heritage**

89. Exhibitions at local and regional museums (in addition to national galleries or on an international stage) are crucial in telling forgotten stories in a manner that can reach a broader audience than a simple statue. Local and regional authorities have influence over the cultural policies and budgets of local and regional museums, galleries, festivals, and cultural programming.

90. An exhibition or artistic performance is considerably easier to organise than creating a new memorial museum or even erecting a public monument. For example, the *Revolusi* exhibition (2022) in Amsterdam’s Rijksmuseum told the story of the Indonesian struggle for independence through artwork curated by both Dutch and Indonesian experts, in contrast to the physical monuments across the Netherlands that only commemorate fallen Dutch soldiers.

91. Also in 2022, the Nordic Pavilion at the Venice Biennale was renamed the Sámi Pavilion to give recognition to indigenous peoples and artists who for the first time were able to exhibit their cultural heritage at such a prestigious event. The exposure of Sámi artists at such an international setting in which they are representing their countries can then be used to reinforce similar exhibits at local and regional museums where they would not necessarily be depicted only as minorities in society, but as representatives of their country.

CONCLUSIONS

92. Contested, conflicting and forgotten cultural heritage has always been a matter of contention. Today, in Europe, it has a particular resonance. As the continent grapples with its relatively recent experiences of empire, totalitarianism and conflict, the historical legacy is complex, weighty and open to a variety of interpretations. Added to this, recent years have seen a resurgence of extreme nationalism and populism that often comes with a closed and entrenched view of the past and the cultural heritage that derives from it, and sometimes with a political agenda of exploiting it.

93. Debates and tensions around these issues are often very stark at the local and regional level. This is not only because memories of past events live on in the local communities where they occurred, but also because that is where they are so often marked or commemorated by statues and monuments and ceremonies and institutions, among other things. In turn, it is local and regional authorities that often have the administrative responsibility for commissioning, managing or even ending these signifiers of cultural memory. When the memory or site in question becomes controversial, it is for sub-national governments to play a leading role in finding the solution.

94. Ensuring that discussion of contested memories and decisions about the heritage associated with it uphold European values and standards in human rights, democracy and the rule of law is not easy, but it is absolutely possible. Open and participatory consultation with relevant stakeholders and the public at large, education that encourages discussion from multiple perspectives, support for cultural events, museums and tourism that ensure diversity of viewpoints, and collaboration between different communities – sometimes across international borders – are among the strategies that have been used over recent years with positive results. Local and regional authorities have the opportunity to work together, learn from one another and put these practices to good effect, so that there is a greater understanding between people about the past and a more consensual way to manage its physical presence in communities across the continent.