EICR-CR-ICG (2026) 5

23 October 2026, Luxembourg

FIRST MEETING OF **THE BUREAU** OF THE GOVERNING BOARD OF THE ENLARGED PARTIAL AGREEMENT ON CULTURAL ROUTES

and

THE INFORMAL CONTACT GROUP OF CULTURAL ROUTES (ICG)

Tuesday 22 September 2026 (11:00 > 13:00)

Double Tree Hotel, Yerevan, ARMENIA

REPORT

1. Opening of the meeting; adoption of the agenda

Rui Gomes opened the meeting, highlighting that it was a long-awaited opportunity for discussion. The participants introduced themselves.

The participants agreed that Rui would facilitate the meeting. They were also informed that Quintín Correas Domingo had not attended any previous meetings of the ICG. Danko Ćosic sent his apologies, as he was unable to attend the Forum.

The agenda of the meeting was adopted.

2. Expectations for the meeting

Most expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to engage in this dialogue, seeing it as a positive step towards moving forward together. They also highlighted the clear need for closer cooperation, given the programme's recent growth. Furthermore, closer dialogue between the Enlarged Partial Agreement (EPA) representatives and the Cultural Routes is essential to ensure that the needs and perspectives of the Routes are heard and conveyed at the ministerial level.

The following expectations by the Bureau and ICG were shared:

- Strengthen collaboration between the Governing Board and the Cultural Routes to achieve better results together;
- Develop a joint working strategy between the Cultural Routes and EPA representatives;
- Use the 40th anniversary as an opportunity to develop a shared vision and enhance the visibility of the programme;
- Foster closer mutual support to further develop and strengthen the programme;
- Ensure that the Cultural Routes are included in the national agendas of EPA representatives and the relevant ministries.

Some participants also shared their views and highlighted several challenges regarding cooperation between the Cultural Routes and the Governing Board, including:

- The perception that the Governing Board and the Cultural Routes are on opposing sides (understandable, but not constructive nor necessary).
- Not all ministry representatives seem to have an in-depth knowledge of the programme. This can make it more challenging for them to provide effective support to the Cultural Routes at the national level.
- The potential of the programme can also be a weakness, as its diversity can make coordination and cooperation among the different stakeholders more challenging. In addition, significant differences in economic conditions and challenges exist within the various Cultural Routes, which can affect cooperation and the implementation of joint activities.

3. Exchange about the role of the Informal Contact Group in relation to the Bureau and the Governing Board

Regarding the participation of Cultural Routes representatives in Governing Board meetings, it was recalled that before the pandemic period, the coordinator of the former Task Force was invited to the meeting for a half an hour exchange.

Rui recalled that Danko had participated online on behalf of the ICG in the last meeting of the EPA Governing Board, held in Luxembourg on 5–7 May 2026. It was noted that, when the possibility of inviting an ICG member to the meeting was discussed with the Governing Board, some hesitation had been observed.
Rui invited the Bureau members to share their views on this.
The Bureau members shared the following reflections:

- The opportunity to invite an ICG member to the Governing Board was warmly welcomed by the Bureau.
- The perception of Danko not being welcome may be linked to the different roles of the ministries and the Cultural Routes.

ICG members noted that Danko's *online* participation in the meeting may have contributed to this feeling. In contrast, Simone Zagrodnik felt very welcome when representing the ICG at the Reflection Group meeting in Strasbourg in June, which brought together representatives from Governing Board.
The participants concluded that these different perceptions may stem from the different modes of operation:

- At the Governing Board level, countries have a more formal and strict approach.
- At the Cultural Routes level, the focus is on representing the programme.

To move forward and avoid similar situations in the future, it was agreed that the Bureau should communicate more with Governing Board members about the practice of inviting Routes representatives to Governing Board meetings, reiterating the relevance of their participation and the importance of close collaboration between the two stakeholders.

Some Governing Board members may sometimes express hesitation. Nevertheless, building strong relationships between the stakeholders remains essential and is crucial to reflect on how to facilitate this communication.

Rui also underlined that the Secretariat aims to ensure that the EPA countries are involved at the national level and contribute to implementing the programme's mission.

4. Relations and communication between the routes and the members of the Governing Board, including visibility and cooperation in the member states

Cooperation should come from both sides, with the EPA and the Cultural Routes taking an active role in strengthening their relationship and supporting each other.

The Routes' members should take a more active role and ask for support whenever needed. At the same time, the EPA Governing Board members should consider the Routes' representatives as partners and consult them when necessary. In addition, it was noted that some new and potential members from various countries are not fully aware of the programme and its added value. The Governing Board members should help raise awareness among heritage stakeholders and provide information about the programme, its framework and its implementation at the national level.

The participants agreed on the importance of addressing two key questions: What can the Cultural Routes do for the EPA, and what can the EPA do for the Cultural Routes?

To address these questions, a clearer mutual understanding between the Cultural Routes and the EPA is needed, taking into account current challenges and ongoing changes, including:

- Increasing competition for funding opportunities;
- The different needs and capacities of the Cultural Routes;
- Developing strategies at the ministerial level to address these challenges;
- Strengthening political engagement with the European Commission.

It was also suggested to look at how other initiatives, such as the European Heritage Label address similar challenges and to explore opportunities offered by the Commission's Culture Compass and other European fundings.

5. Exchange of views about recent and on-going processes, including the Reflection Group on Representativeness and the (re)certification processes

Simone shared that her participation in the Reflection Group on Representativeness last June had been a positive experience and she emphasised the importance of transparency in this process.

Another point concerned national meetings and events organised in different countries. The ICG members suggested inviting national members of the respective Cultural Routes and informing the Routes' management about these events, as they could advise on who would be best placed to represent the Route. This would also help ensure that the management remains informed about ongoing discussions and developments.

Rui also mentioned that discussions are ongoing regarding the certification process, particularly the role and function of the annual reports. Efforts are being made to clarify and simplify the process. The relaunch of the pool of experts is also expected in the near future.

In relation to communication with the Routes' management and national members, Maria Luprano mentioned that, despite contacting the managers directly, she often receives no feedback or response. This creates challenges for the ongoing preparation of the Country Mapping Document for Italy.

6. Expectations for the celebrations of the 40 years of the programme

Rui noted that the 40th anniversary of the programme represents an important opportunity to celebrate and promote it, and that every effort should be made to make the most of this occasion. At the same time, he also highlighted the limited human resources available at the Secretariat. A proposal to establish a working group involving members of both the ICG and the Governing Board was also suggested.

The ICG members underlined the importance of making the most of the entire anniversary year and making efforts to implement the 52–52 proposal discussed at the 2026 Training Academy. In addition, taking action as early as possible is crucial to ensure timely progress.

Rui mentioned that the topic of the anniversary celebrations is expected to be discussed during the informal Governing Board meeting on the afternoon of 22 September in Yerevan.

Victor Sorenssen highlighted that 2027 Training Academy could also play a special role for the celebrations of the anniversary.

Rui closed the discussion by underling that this meeting constituted a good starting point of cooperation between the Cultural Routes (ICG) and Governing Board (Bureau).

7. Further communication and exchange between the Bureau and the ICG

The point was not addressed due to time constraints.

_____

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

The Bureau

SERGIO ORTEGA MUÑOZ (Chair) - Spain

ESZTER CSONKA-TAKÁCS (Vice-chair) - Hungary

ASTGHIK MARABYAN - Armenia

ILJA KOCIAN – Czechia

MARIA LUPRANO – Italy

The Informal Contact Group

ANTONIO BARONE, Phoenicians' Route

BENEDETTA DIAMANTI, European Route of Ceramics

DANKO ĆOSIC, Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route (Apologised)

INGER HALEVI, The Hansa

QUINTÍN CORREAS DOMINGO, Cooperation Network of the Routes of Emperor Charles V (Apologised)

SIMONE ZAGRODNIK, European Route of Historical Thermal Towns

VICTOR SORENSSEN, European Route of Jewish Heritage (Host of the 2027 Training Academy)

Secretariat

CRINA ZUGRAV	Project Officer, European Institute of Cultural Routes
RUI GOMES	Director of the European Institute of Cultural Routes Executive Secretary of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes