

EICR-CR-ICG (2026) 4

31 August 2026
Luxembourg

ONLINE MEETING OF THE INFORMAL CONTACT GROUP OF CULTURAL ROUTES

Wednesday 19 August 2026 (09:00 – 11:00) (CET)

REPORT

Document prepared by the EICR Secretariat

1. OPENING OF THE MEETING AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

RUI GOMES opened the meeting. The ICG members expressed their appreciation and positive feedback for the quality and timely distribution of the 13th Training Academy report.

The agenda of the meeting was adopted.

2. RECENT UPDATES IN THE PROGRAMME

Rui invited the ICG members to share any important updates and news from their respective routes.

INGER HARLEVI informed that the Hansa is working on a book project involving young people (Youth Hansa) from Hanseatic cities where different Cultural Routes intersect. They would write stories related to Cultural Routes, highlighting how multiple Routes can be experienced and discovered within the same city. The project should follow the concept of the *Hanse Links* edition and is planned to be launched in 2027.

DANKO ČOSIC informed that during the summer period, the Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route has been working on developing a new website for the network.

ANTONIO BARONE shared that the Phoenicians' Route was working lately on the recertification files. The network also aims to further strengthen its development in Eastern countries through the accession of new members from the region. He added that sharing the contact details of some EPA representatives would be highly appreciated, as it would be useful to establish initial contact with them before meeting in person at the Forum in Yerevan. He further informed that after the Forum, he will be going on a mission to Tbilisi (Georgia) with BENEDETTA DIAMANTI for some special course on Peace with some Universities. This is a good opportunity to benefit from being there and to further strengthen the position of the Route in the region.

BENEDETTA informed that the European Route of Ceramics is working on the preparation of the General Assembly of the network to take place in Italy in September. Other Cultural Routes based in Italy and the Italian EPA Representative are invited. She also outlined the importance of having small meetings with Cultural Routes from the same country or Cultural Routes crossroads. The Café Europe with the European Route of Historical Thermal Towns was a very good initiative, and the intention is to replicate it, because not all the members of the routes can be present in the Training Academies and strengthening the cooperation between the Routes is crucial. Furthermore, she highlighted that it would be important to make the most of the opportunity to be in Armenia for the Forum and continue efforts to establish contacts with potential members in Armenia and Georgia. She suggested receiving a list of potentially interested members in advance, particularly those that could be interested in joining certified Routes, so that the necessary preparations could be made accordingly.

SIMONE ZAGRODNIK welcomed that the idea of Café Europe is to be replicated. She further shared that the European Route of Historical Thermal Towns was busy with preparing the recertification files. She also suggested sharing some feedback with the

Secretariat regarding the updated recertification form. The network is also preparing the General Assembly to be held in Greece, under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and with the support of the EPA Representative of Greece. This will be a good opportunity to hold the meeting in the country and further develop the Route there.

Rui clarified that the contacts of the EPA member states representatives should be available as the EPA representatives are civil servants and their contacts are professional. He agreed on the usefulness of a list of local stakeholders and Forum participants to be shared among the Routes for establishing a first contact before meeting onsite in Yerevan. In addition, he welcomed the suggestion to receive feedback for the updated recertification form from those Routes that undergo regular evaluation within the 2026-2027 certification cycle.

Rui also shared some of the recent developments in the Programme:

- The preparations of the Forum are ongoing; The Programme's Forum still may change;
- The 2027 Training Academy is confirmed to take place in Izmir, co-organised with the European Route of Jewish Heritage and the Municipality of Izmir;
- A publication with the Ministry of Culture of Greece showcasing best practices and examples of Routes in Greece is being prepared for presentation at the Council of Europe by the Permanent Representation of Greece. This initiative would be particularly relevant in 2027 and would contribute to strengthening the political relevance and visibility of the Programme;
- The certification cycle 2026-2027 includes 7 official candidates; some other candidates were not eligible or postponed their applications in order to strengthen their networks;
- The database of independent experts will be renewed in 2026 according to the Council of Europe regulations;
- The next meeting of the Reflection Group on Representativeness will be held on 9-11 December in Venice.

Danko raised the discussion on the certification process, particularly regarding the work of the independent experts. It was noted, based on the experience of the Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route, that one of the experts had contacted Route members without informing the Route manager, which was considered not in line with the expected approach. In addition, it was mentioned that some evaluators come from different entities or structures and may not always have a full understanding of the functioning of the Cultural Routes, including their operational and financial realities.

Antonio shared that many of the experts come from EU projects, which may not always fully reflect the specific spirit and objectives of the Programme of Cultural Routes. It was suggested that training for evaluators could possibly be organised, with the involvement of routes that are not currently under evaluation.

Rui indicated that the Secretariat is aware of these challenges and that some experts may occasionally go beyond their remit or have different interpretations of what is expected of them, with some remaining more focused on an academic approach. It was suggested that an exchange with the EPA Bureau during the meeting in Yerevan could provide an opportunity to further reflect on these challenges and possible ways forward.

Simone suggested that experts could adopt a more constructive approach during the evaluation process, focusing on identifying the Route's areas for improvement and asking, "What are the weak points of your Route?"

Rui proposed that a meeting between the evaluated Route and the expert could potentially be held once the report is finalised, to allow an open and frank dialogue, without interfering with the evaluation process or the Governing Board's decision. He noted the possibility of holding a meeting between some recently evaluated Routes and experts during the Forum, providing an opportunity for dialogue, exchange and feedback.

3. PREPARATIONS OF THE 2026 ADVISORY FORUM

Rui informed of the changed venue for the last day (25 September) of the Forum.

Concerning the side meetings that the ICG should attend, the following meetings were mentioned:

- ICG and EPA Bureau meeting on 22 September;
- Cultural Routes meeting on 23 September;
- ICG meeting: The date is still to be finalised, with a possible meeting during lunch on 23 September.

Simone expressed her concerns regarding having only one person managing the hotel reservations for the Forum, which may result in delays in receiving a response. The Secretariat indicated that this would be followed up with the Armenian colleagues to explore ways to improve these arrangements.

4. PREPARATION OF THE ROUTES' MEETING IN YEREVAN

Rui informed that the potential facilitator of the Routes' meeting was contacted.

As for opening of the meeting to the candidate Cultural Routes, the ICG members confirmed that the meeting is only for the certified Cultural Routes.

Rui suggested sharing with ICG the list of expected Routes to come to Yerevan Forum.

The agenda was presented. It was highlighted that an important point will be the *ICG ROLE AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES*, as this will need to be reported to the Governing Board in May 2027.

The ICG members agreed that Rui will introduce this point and then invite them to share their perspectives on the functioning of the group. This will be followed by comments from the Cultural Routes representatives present at the meeting, including their suggestions on how the work of the ICG could be improved.

Danko informed the members that, unfortunately, he will not be present at the Forum, but suggested highlighting during this agenda point that the Cultural Routes have a voice in the Programme through the ICG, and that this voice should now be further strengthened.

For the point *SHARING OF ON-GOING INTER-ROUTES COOPERATION PROJECTS*, the participants agreed that the Secretariat would launch a call ahead of the meeting to collect the interest of those Cultural Routes that would like to present specifying technical instructions (such as maximum of 3 slides and the maximum allocated time). This would allow for better management of the meeting time.

The agenda will be revised along with the questionnaire/call.

5. MEETING WITH THE EPA BUREAU IN YEREVAN

Rui informed the ICG members that an agenda would be prepared for the meeting and invited them to suggest any points they would like to include.

The ICG members proposed the following agenda points:

- How to improve the relationship and strengthen the trust between the member states and the Cultural Routes?
- Facilitation of the communication between the member states and Cultural Routes;
- (Re)certification process and the work of the independent experts;
- Strengthening the role of the Cultural Routes on national level.

It was also suggested to share the report of the 13th Training Academy with the EPA Governing Board. Rui informed the ICG that an agenda would be proposed to the EPA Bureau and then shared with them afterwards. He also asked about news regarding Quintin's participation in the ICG; his replacement in the ICG may be considered.

Rui informed the members that the Route organising the 2027 Training Academy could join the ICG.

6. 40th ANNIVERSARY PREPARATIONS

Rui informed the ICG that there were not many updates to share regarding the preparations, given the summer holiday period. The Secretariat has received three proposals for the Anniversary logo from the Council of Europe and invited the ICG members to share their feedback.

- The three proposed logos were considered suitable for institutional communication, but less suitable for a broader communication campaign;
- The proposals do not sufficiently communicate the spirit and purpose of the Anniversary;
- The colours and the graphics should be changed.

Rui recalled that a video competition should be prepared and launched for the Anniversary and that the Anniversary paper should be updated for the meeting in Yerevan.

He also reminded that the voluntary contributions from the EPA Representatives was launched, but nothing was proposed to EPA member states without having the financial backup.

The updated paper on the 40th anniversary preparations will be shared with ICG once updated. Rui also agreed with ICG members on the need to have a specific communication campaign.

Danko suggested to use the 40 in the campaign as a symbol for 2027 and other members agreed that the idea is good and clear instructions on this would be needed.

7. NEXT STEPS AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held in Yerevan at the occasion of the Forum.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Members

ANTONIO BARONE	Phoenicians' Route
BENEDETTA DIAMANTI	European Route of Ceramics
DANKO ĆOSIC	Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route
INGER HARLEVI	The Hansa
<i>QUINTÍN CORREAS DOMINGO (Absent)</i>	<i>The Routes of Emperor Charles V</i>
SIMONE ZAGRODNIK	European Route of Historical Thermal Towns

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