

EICR-CR-ICG (2026)

1 July 2026
Luxembourg

SECOND MEETING OF THE INFORMAL CONTACT GROUP OF CULTURAL ROUTES

Friday 5 June 2026 (14:30 – 17:00)

Szechenyi ter 7-8

Művészeti és irodalom háza - Pécs

REPORT

Document prepared by the EICR Secretariat

1. OPENING AND INTRODUCTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

RUI GOMES, Director of the European Institute of Cultural Routes, Executive Secretary of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, opened the meeting. He informed that two members of the ICG had sent apologies for their absence (QUINTIN CORREAS DOMINGO and ANTONIO BARONE).

2. AGENDA AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF THE MEETING

The agenda was adopted.

3. NEWS ABOUT THE GROUP

Rui invited the ICG members to share their views on the group and to indicate whether they had received any feedback from other Route representatives regarding the ICG pilot project. Members of the group shared their comments:

- Most members expressed overall satisfaction with the current composition of the group, but the mandate and role of the ICG require further clarification;
- The representativeness of all routes in the group is often questioned;
- Having a calendar of forthcoming meetings was highlighted, as it would facilitate planning in advance;
- Communication between the group and the Institute can be significantly improved; members did not feel fully involved and the communication from the Secretariat, particularly in relation to the Training Academy preparations;
- Members reported receiving mixed feedback from fellow members and other routes, with some expressing a positive view of the pilot project, while others were less favourable;
- They further emphasized that the ICG remains at an early stage as a pilot project and that improved coordination and collaboration would be beneficial.

Rui extended apologies for not having ensured a smoother communication so far. He considered that coordinating the ICG would be more straightforward, but it requires more dedicated time. Further efforts will be made to improve the communication and to hold more online meetings. Concerning the mandate and representativeness of the ICG, he recalled that members were not elected by the Routes. The group was composed out of those who had expressed interest, which was limited in number.

He also commented on the remit of the Route representatives as organisers of the Training Academies and their mandate within the group. The representative of the 2026 Academy should remain in the group with the route of the 2027, at least in the preparation phase.

4. FEEDBACK AND RELEVANT DECISIONS OF THE GOVERNING BOARD

Rui invited Danko to share feedback on his online participation in the Governing Board of the Enlarged Partial Agreement, held in May 2026 in Luxembourg. As ICG member he presented recent developments of the group and on the organisation of the 2026 Training Academy.

He reported that he had not felt fully welcomed during the meeting. While he emphasized that this was not directed at him personally, he noted his concern regarding the overall impression conveyed.

Rui informed the members that some reservations had been expressed regarding the participation of a Route representative in the statutory meeting. He explained that, when the possibility of Danko attending the meeting in person was proposed, several members favoured online participation instead.

Rui recalled that, according to the Rules of Procedure, the participation of a representative of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe is welcomed, subject to the agreement of the member states.

He further reported that the Governing Board had welcomed the establishment of the ICG and acknowledged the initiative positively. At the same time, questions were raised regarding the Group's informal structure, with some members suggesting that a more formal framework could be considered. Rui noted that he had expected stronger support from the member states for this pilot initiative. He informed that the Board decided to request the Secretariat and the Bureau to propose ways of evaluating the outcomes and added value of the Group.

ICG members noted that, in the past, the former Task Force had operated separately from the Governing Board and the EPA member states. They also recalled that sharing the contact details of member states had not always been well received.

Inger informed the Group that she was invited as (former) coordinator of the Task Force to Governing Board meetings until the pandemic.

Members stressed the importance of fostering closer interaction between Route representatives and the EPA member states. Creating this space is crucial for a good cooperation between these two important stakeholders of the programme.

In light of these reflections, Rui proposed exploring, as a first step, the possibility of holding a meeting between the EPA Bureau and the ICG during the Forum.

5. FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND FEEDBACK OF THE 13TH TRAINING ACADEMY

Rui invited the participants to reflect on the 2026 Training Academy and to share their views on the aspects that were particularly successful, as well as on areas for improvement for future editions. In this regard, the following positive aspects were highlighted, in particular:

- The involvement of an external facilitator for the programme was appreciated;
- Positive feedback about the working groups and the participant-led sessions;
- Possibility for networking and openness of the routes to cooperate more;
- More time allocated for networking and informal exchanges was highly appreciated.

Regarding the less positive impressions and areas of improvement, the following observations were shared:

- The functioning of coffee machines need to be seriously improved (!);
- The early departure of participants on Friday morning, ahead of the participant-led sessions, was noted. Participants should be encouraged to stay for the full programme;
- The distance between the venue of the academy and most accommodations was considerable and could be improved;
- The absence of technical sessions from the Secretariat on the requirements for certification as a Cultural Route and on the criteria to be fulfilled;
- The poverty of the "training" component in the "Training Academy";
- The presentations on tourism could be improved by addressing more specific aspects of the tourism sector rather than remaining too general. In addition, some questions on sustainable tourism and Routes could have been more targeted and tailored;

- Further clarification was requested regarding the participation of candidate Routes in the meeting; some members considered that participation should be limited to certified Cultural Routes.

With regards to the feedback and observations above, Rui agreed that the Training Academy should include more training modules with different experts. He also summarised the post-event follow-up and mainly that:

- A report of the meeting will be prepared and shared with all the participants;
- Presentations will be made available to participants, together with a media gallery;
- List of participants with their emails will be shared with all attendees.

Concerning the participation of the candidates to the meeting, Rui clarified that they were invited following the Rules of procedure of the EPA Governing Board that states: *Candidate networks are strongly recommended to attend programme events (Annual Forum, Training Academy).*

The participants further shared their impressions of the outcomes of the working sessions. They discussed the “52-52” proposal for 2027, marking the 40th anniversary of the programme, which would allocate one week for the promotion of each Route within the framework of the programme.

The cooperation idea emerging from the cooperation session was also presented, in particular the “Culture Moves Here” project, which could support matchmaking between Routes and potentially be featured in the programme newsletter.

The idea of producing a 52-second promotional video for 2027 was also discussed, along with the associated challenges, such as limited funding, rights ownership, and the need for clarification of the framework. At the same time a social media campaign should be prepared. Participants underlined the importance of making use of this momentum to strengthen the visibility and relevance of the programme. The need to appoint a contact person within the Institute to facilitate coordination was also stressed.

Rui mentioned the budget limitations of the programme and suggested the possibility of launching crowdfunding for activities related to the 40th anniversary. The option of requesting voluntary contributions from EPA member states was also raised.

In addition, it was noted that an administrative and creative decision is needed for the preparation of a video, in particular to clarify the target audience and to consider the establishment of a co-creative committee for this purpose.

6. PARTICIPATION IN THE REFLECTION GROUP ON REPRESENTATIVENESS

Rui gave a quick overview about the ongoing work of the Reflection Group. He mentioned that representatives of the Saint James Way and Cyril and Methodius Route are part of the group. For the second meeting to be held in June in Strasbourg, Rui stated that an ICG member should attend and requested confirmation of members’ availability. It was agreed that SIMONE ZAGRODNIK would be invited to represent the ICG at the Reflection Group.

7. PREPARATION OF THE ROUTES’ MEETING IN YEREVAN

For the routes’ meeting in Yerevan, Rui mentioned that the secretariat will propose an agenda and he opened the floor for the points to be included.

Based on the discussions, the following points should be included in the agenda:

- Training Academy role and feedback, with best practices from the previous edition;

- Ukraine involvement and Ukrainian participants in the Programme’s activities;
- Representativeness and developing the score card;
- Youth perspective;
- 40th anniversary preparations and initiatives.

8. COOPERATION WITH THE UNIVERSITY NETWORK

Rui informed the participants about the upcoming second edition of the Academic Conference, which will take place on 12-13 November in Lugano, Switzerland. He suggested that one or two members of the ICG should attend the conference.

9. WORKING METHODS OF THE INFORMAL CONTACT GROUP

Due to time constraints, the item could not be discussed in detail. Nevertheless, the ICG members agreed that there is no spokesperson for the group and that the ICG should be further consolidated, playing an important role in bringing member states and Routes closer together and contributing to the preparations for the 40th anniversary of the programme.

10. NEXT STEPS AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The participants agreed on the schedule for the next ICG meetings as follows:

- Online meeting on 15 July (09-11h CEST) to discuss the feedback from the Reflection Group on Representativeness and others.
- Online meeting on 19 August (09-11h CEST)

The proposal to hold a meeting between the EPA Bureau and the ICG was also discussed. It was suggested that this meeting could be organised during the Annual Forum in Yerevan on 22 September (11:00–13:00 AMT).

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Members

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

Secretariat

CRINA ZUGRAV	Project Officer, European Institute of Cultural Routes
BEYZA GOCGUN	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