

FEDERATION SPELEOLOGIQUE EUROPEENNE

European Cave Protection Commission



Petition to Stop Trade, Import and Export of Cave Contents

Regarding Article 3(b) and (l) of the Treaty establishing the European Community and the UNESCO Convention (concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage), we, the signatory organisations, petition to stop the trade, the import and the export of cave contents.

Analogous to the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, there is an urgent need for a convention on the nonliving heritage of the world. This includes among others cave contents.

Caves and karst areas are transboundary regions, but the legal framework dealing with caves and cave protection varies greatly within the EU memberstates. The EU Habitats Directive only mentions bats but no other cave fauna. The EU Groundwater Directive does not take karst phenomena like high flow rates and low filtration capacity into account. With the ongoing climatic change and the expected water shortage the importance of karst aquifers will increase even more. Up to now there still is a profound lack of knowledge, concern and protection for caves and karst in the European Community.

Caves are one of the most fragile ecosystems in the world. They are also archives - archives of evolution, culture, climate and geological history. To be meaningful, the protection of caves has to include the protection of cave contents - otherwise it would only be the protection of the cover of a book without its pages.

Cave contents include speleothems, fossils and archeological findings. Speleothems are defined as any natural mineral formation or deposit occurring in a cave or lava tube, including but not limited to stalactites, stalagmites, helictites, cave flowers, flowstones, concretions, draperies, rimstones or formations of clay or mud.

Caves from which stalactites, stalagmites or other speleothems have been removed lose their glamour and beauty. Besides this loss of aesthetic and emotional value, invaluable scientific informations which are contained in these, like palaeoclimatic data, are lost as well. The trade in these unique formations fosters the destruction of the beauty and the scientific context of caves.

Fossils and subfossils are often found in caves and their uncontrolled removal is not only a loss for scientific research but can also lead to significant damages of the cave and its contents.

Generally, all member states have laws dealing with archeological discoveries. However, archeological sites inside caves are usually not easily visible. Experts are needed to detect and evaluate sites prior to their uncovering. Even minimal changes in sensitive sections of a cave can lead to the total destruction of a unique archeological site.

Scientific investigations of speleothems, fossils or other cave contents must always be reduced to a minimum, to avoid an excessive depletion of the cave's natural features. Decisions require careful considerations by specialist researchers and advise from experienced cave and karst experts. If research on a speleothem or fossil will likely result in the destruction of a sampling site, the choice should be to abstain from the study.

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To ensure the protection of cave contents, the following demands have to be implemented:

- a) No speleothems or fragments of these (even if already broken), fossils or archaeological findings should be extracted from caves, except for cases mentioned under c).
- b) A stop of trade, import and export of cave contents has to be enforced.
- c) Scientific sampling has to be restricted in quantity and damages to the absolute necessary minimum. Scientific benefits have to be maximized through consultation with cave experts.

Organisation, date, signature . . .

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