

Declaration on Protection of Karst and Cave as natural, cultural and environmental Heritage

Definitions

karst: A terrane, generally underlain by limestone or dolomite, in which the topography is chiefly formed by the dissolving of rock, and which may be characterized by sinkholes, sinking streams, closed depressions, subterranean drainage, and caves.

cave: 'A natural home in the ground, large enough for human entry' is probably the most useful definition. This covers the enormous variety of caves that do occur but eliminates the many artificial tunnels and galleries incorrectly named caves.

Having convened in Brussels on January 24, 2008, we, the signers, declare:

- having regard that the European Union is dedicated to the task of promoting, conserving and protecting the environment, biodiversity and habitats in Europe
 - having regard that there is no existent European law or directive related to the protection karst as complex and fragile ecosystem
 - having regard that there is no existent European law or directive related to the protection of caves as geotopes
 - having regard that there is no existent European law or directive related to the protection of the inventory of caves like sediments, speleothems, archaeological and palaeontological findings
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- A. Karst and cave are worth protecting geotopes in Europe and should be included in European programs and directives to promote and realise this protection.
 - B. Karst and cave as natural heritage are included in the protection of geotopes in Europe, as they do not have the capacity to return to its initial states after a disturbance has modified the parameters.
 - C. Caves in general represent unique geotopes in the European natural heritage that can only be preserved by protecting the caves themselves in combination with their surrounding (surface features of karst).
 - D. Karst areas play an important role in the European water supply and thus provides a foundation for further social and economic development and thereby enhances environmental protection.

- E. Palaeolithical caves represent unique parts of the European archaeological heritage that can only be preserved by protecting the caves themselves and their surrounding
 - F. The speleological heritage is a major element regarding the diversity of landscapes in Europe.
 - G. Caves include both the cultural heritage and the natural heritage marked by man's way of living in time and place.
 - H. Caves as cultural sites present in the numerous amount of archaeological sites in Europe one very small part, but the one with the worst protection facilities, as their relevance for science and their meaning for our European cultural heritage is not included officially.
 - I. The conservation of the numerous elements of archaeological heritage provides a foundation for further social and economic development and thereby enhances environmental protection, employment opportunities and European integration,
 - J. The European speleological heritage in its entirety, independently of its European, national or local dimension, of fundamental value to European natural patrimony.
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1. Calls on the EU that speleological heritage must be regarded as an indivisible whole requiring the adoption of joint protective measures;
 2. Calls on the Commission, in drafting its legislative proposals, to implement effectively the geotop protection with regard to karst and cave as natural sites and cultural settlements with a view to ensuring that measures to promote them are embodied in all European Union policies.
 3. Stresses that sustainable development presupposes an integrated approach to the natural and cultural environment.
 4. Calls for all the institutions and governments of the EU to develop policies that protect the natural and archaeological heritage from industrial and construction interests.
 5. Urges the European Union, the Member States, the local authorities and non-governmental organisations to take action to protect and rehabilitate Europe's speleological heritage.
 6. Considers that the factors to be taken into account in order to develop this particular sector, with due regard to the subsidiary principle, must include:
 - a systematic survey of karst and cave
 - environmental education of karst and cave

- the incorporation of the incentives for conservation of caves will ensure that this patrimony will continue to be studied by speleologists and other related specialists such as karstologists, geo(morpho)logists, archaeologists, palaeontologists, biologists, climatologists etc. This, considering also that caves must remain accessible to the speleologists and the other specialists in cave and karst related science and respected in the event of industrial activities in the area.
 - financial assistance for projects
7. Calls on the Member States, Regions and local authorities, in cooperation with the Commission, to promote the protection and conservation of speleological heritage through the structural funds.
 8. Calls on the Commission to promote the sharing and exchange of experiences in this field through European conferences and meetings in co-operation with the speleological federations, because karst and underground waters have no border.
 9. Calls on the Member States, Interregions and local authorities to work in cooperation with the Commission and the speleologists to protect and preserve caves, promoting its existence with a sense of respect for the cultural and natural heritage that resides in them.