



Rappresentanza Permanente d'Italia  
OSCE

## SECURITY COMMITTEE MEETING

### PRESENTATION BY WARRANT OFFICER ANGELO RAGUSA – CARABINIERI TPC ROME

#### **"Police best practices for the investigation of property crimes and trafficking in cultural property, good practices in national legislation and the creation of national units for property crimes"**

Vienna, 21 November 2023

Authorities, distinguished guests, good morning.

First of all, I would like to thank Ambassador Stelian Stoian, Chair of the OSCE Security Committee, for the invitation to our Command. I would like to thank also all the Authorities present here today.

Since 1969, the Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (known as the TPC) has distinguished itself at an international level, anticipating by one year the UNESCO Convention of 1970, thanks to the establishment of our Command, equipped with trained personnel, to whom we entrust the task of ensuring the protection of cultural heritage and the fight against crimes in the sector.

With the evolution of criminal dynamics, over the course of its 54 years of life, the TPC has been the subject of a continuous reorganization, up to its present distribution throughout the national territory, in parallel with the improvement and strengthening of the tools used in police activities, aimed at the prevention and repression of crimes against cultural heritage.

Since his creation, the TPC has recovered more than 3 million of cultural assets and in 2022 alone, more than 40,000 artefacts including archaeological finds, paleontological, paintings, sculptures, objects of worship. But that's not all, there have been numerous restitutions to third countries of seized assets coming from their territories.

Our Command has a functional dependence by the Ministry of Culture, thus making its skills available to support the Ministry of Culture in its cultural diplomacy activities, providing the necessary information elements to achieve the recovery of works of historical, artistic and archaeological interest removed from our nation.

All our investigative activities are supported by adequate regulatory provisions, constantly evolving and updated, as was the case of the Law No. 22 of 23 March 2022, which transposes and implements the indications of the 2017 Nicosia Convention through the introduction of new articles relating to crimes against cultural heritage in the Criminal Code, increasing the power of intervention and investigative activities of the Police Forces, aggravating the punishments, introducing new crimes and giving the possibility to conduct undercover operations and wiretaps.

Investigations, however, require interoperability between the law enforcements and the judicial authorities. In this context, the TPC plays a fundamental role, being a qualified structure of the Carabinieri, which is mainly and prioritized with the competence of the specific specialty sector, as a center of information gravitation and analysis.

Technological development has also made a valuable contribution to the prevention and suppression of illegal acts. Since the 1980s, in carrying out its institutional tasks, the TPC has made use of a powerful IT tool, the "Database of illicitly stolen cultural heritage", the largest database in the world in this field, containing more than 200,000 events and more than 8 million archived cultural assets, of which about 1,300,000 are to be searched.

The extensive use of computer systems has stimulated criminal organizations dedicated to the illicit trafficking of cultural goods to use e-commerce sites and social media, both on the web and on the "deep web". For this reason, it was necessary to update the technological devices and systems in use by our Command. We have come up with the S.W.O.A.D.S. (Stolen Works Of Art Detection System) project, an IT system that allows us to carry out the automatic collection of data from the web, deep web, social media as well as the information entered during the control activities made by the TPC's militaries, comparing everything them with the textual and photographic contents of the works of art registered in our Database.

Of equal importance to the Command is the public awareness, since effective protection of cultural heritage can only be achieved through the support and contribution of the communities. In 2022, in order to permanently highlight our fight in this field, the Ministry of Culture, in collaboration with our Command, established a special museum

structure called the "Museum of Saved Art – MAS". Through temporary exhibitions of the recovered works of art, the investigations concluded by the Command are constantly documented to the public. At the end of the exhibitions, each item returns to its territory of origin.

In 2016, Italy was the first country to set up a Task Force "Caschi Blu della Cultura" (Blue Helmets of Culture), made up of qualified members of the TPC and experts from the Italian Ministry of Culture. The task force is designed to intervene following earthquakes or other natural events that affect the cultural heritage, both in Italy and abroad. This unit has been deployed after the earthquakes and floods that took place in various Italian regions in the last years. Its job has been to:

- quantify the damage to cultural heritage;
- safely remove movable objects from damaged churches, museums, public buildings and private apartments at risk of further damage;
- move the cultural property that survived to the calamity to safe places;
- help the local police forces in the counter looting activities.

In this framework, the first task is to identify, well before a natural disaster happens, a safe place to temporarily store the items originally placed in the area that can be affected by the event. The task force has also been employed abroad, in countries such as Mexico, Albania, Lebanon and Croatia where it conducted training courses for other police forces.

All the activities carried out by the TPC are based on the principle that the cultural heritage of a nation constitutes the identity of its people. Therefore, attacking the archaeological, historical and artistic heritage of a nation means inflicting permanent wounds, thus erasing any data referring to the history of the people themselves and the impossibility of handing down to future generations the heritage that has been handed down to us until today.

The construction and maintenance of peace, in the context of global security planning, cannot be separated from the guarantee of the protection of the cultural component and therefore, of the protection of cultural heritage and identities.

In fact, we have seen how cultural heritage often becomes the target to hit a people, precisely because of its enormous identity value and the sense of belonging and social cohesion inherent in the communities that share it.

Although the destruction of cultural property is considered a war crime, as stated in the 1954 Hague Convention, very often we see not only its destruction, but also its use not in accordance with its preservation. This is the case of ancient fortifications which, precisely in the hypothetical respect of the International Conventions for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in the event of armed conflict, should never be hit by the other side and for this reason, but also for their structural conformation, transformed into military camps, with the consequent irreversible damage.

The 17 goals set out in the United Nations' "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" include the protection and safeguarding of the world's cultural and natural heritage, going beyond the concept of the nation's cultural heritage, which until now has been expressed in various national legislations.

A global heritage that will have to be protected and for which the deployment of contingents with adequate levels of skills and specializations is necessary, as in the case of the Carabinieri for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, already operating in the various theaters of crisis.