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WRITTEN DECLARATION

pursuant to Rule 116 of the Rules of Procedure

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on the protection of caves as a cultural, natural and environmental heritage

Lapse date: 4.12.2008

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Written declaration on the protection of caves as a cultural, natural and environmental heritage

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage,
 - having regard to Rule 116 of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas there is at present no European law or directive on the protection of caves and their contents,
- B. whereas caves represent unique geotopes in the European heritage, which can only be preserved by protecting them and their surroundings,
- C. whereas conservation of archaeological and speleological heritage elements provides a foundation for further social and economic development, enhancing European integration,
1. Calls on the Commission to implement effectively cultural protection, as stated in Article 151 of the EC Treaty, with regard to karsts and caves as natural sites, and cultural settlements, in order to ensure that measures to promote them are embodied in all EU policies;
 2. Considers that measures to develop these areas must include:
 - (a) a systematic survey of caves and their surroundings, and their environmental and archaeological heritage;
 - (b) the establishment of a legislative framework to guarantee their protection, and measures to ensure that new buildings and industrial activities are compatible with the nearby environmental and archaeological heritage;
 - (c) incentives for conservation of caves, ensuring that they will be studied by specialists like speleologists, geo(morpho)logists, archaeologists, biologists, climatologists, etc.;
 - (d) financial assistance for projects, conservation and restoration;
 3. Calls on the Member States, in cooperation with the Commission, to promote the protection and conservation of caves and their archaeological heritage;
 4. Instructs its President to forward this declaration, together with the names of the signatories, to the governments of the Member States, and to regional and local authorities.