Cultural Heritage Security in European Union Policy: Contemporary Challenges and Protection Mechanisms

კულტურული მემკვიდრეობის უსაფრთხოება ევროკავშირის პოლიტიკაში: თანამედროვე გამოწვევები და დაცვის მექანიზმები

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Abstract

Introduction. The protection of cultural heritage has emerged as an important dimension of contemporary international policy, particularly in the context of armed conflicts, political crises, occupation, terrorism, illicit archaeological excavations, and the illegal trafficking of cultural property. The destruction or damage of cultural heritage represents more than a cultural loss. It is closely associated with society's historical memory, national and cultural identity, social resilience, and human security. Accordingly, cultural heritage security is increasingly regarded as an interconnected field encompassing cultural policy, security policy, and international cooperation. The aim of this paper is to examine issues of cultural heritage security within the context of European Union policy. It analyzes the principal mechanisms through which the European Union contributes to the protection of cultural heritage and the prevention of related risks. **Methods.** The study is based on an analysis of relevant European Union policy documents, the international legal framework, and scholarly literature. Attention is paid to how cultural heritage protection is integrated into four areas of EU policy: foreign and security policy, international humanitarian cooperation, crisis management, and the sustainable development agenda. **Results.** The analysis identifies several key areas of EU activity. These include preventing damage to cultural heritage resulting from armed conflicts and crises and combating the illicit trafficking of cultural property. They also include documenting cultural heritage sites, ensuring their digital preservation, and promoting cooperation with international organizations and partner states. Cultural heritage assumes particular significance in peacebuilding and conflict transformation processes. Its protection can contribute to dialogue, mutual understanding, and the preservation of social ties within communities. EU policy in this field is also significant for the European Neighborhood and the countries of the Eastern Partnership. It is particularly relevant to Georgia, where parts of the country's cultural heritage face threats resulting from conflict and occupation (Abkhazia and the so-called South Ossetia). The findings demonstrate that, within the EU's contemporary approach, cultural heritage security is gradually extending beyond the narrow framework of cultural policy. It is acquiring broader dimensions related to human security, peacebuilding, social resilience, and international security. **Conclusion.** The protection of cultural heritage can be regarded as an important instrument of both the European Union's internal and external policies. Its effectiveness depends to a significant extent on international cooperation, preventive policies, and the active engagement of local communities. For Georgia, the experience of the European Union represents an important resource in several respects: the protection, monitoring, and documentation of cultural heritage; the creation of digital archives; the development of international cooperation; the prevention of illicit activities directed against cultural heritage.

Keywords: Cultural heritage; Cultural heritage security; European Union policy; Cultural heritage protection; Human security; Conflict; Peacebuilding; Cultural identity; Georgia.

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აბსტრაქტი

შესავალი: კულტურული მემკვიდრეობის დაცვა თანამედროვე საერთაშორისო პოლიტიკის ერთ-ერთ მნიშვნელოვან მიმართულებად ჩამოყალიბდა, განსაკუთრებით შეიარაღებული კონფლიქტების, პოლიტიკური კრიზისების, ოკუპაციის, ტერორიზმის, უკანონო არქეოლოგიური გათხრებისა და კულტურული ფასეულობებით უკანონო ვაჭრობის პირობებში. კულტურული მემკვიდრეობის განადგურება ან დაზიანება მხოლოდ კულტურული დანაკარგი არ არის. იგი დაკავშირებულია საზოგადოების ისტორიულ მეხსიერებასთან, ეროვნულ და კულტურულ იდენტობასთან, სოციალურ მდგრადობასა და ადამიანის უსაფრთხოებასთან. შესაბამისად, კულტურული მემკვიდრეობის უსაფრთხოება სულ უფრო მეტად განიხილება როგორც კულტურული პოლიტიკის, უსაფრთხოების პოლიტიკისა და საერთაშორისო თანამშრომლობის ურთიერთდაკავშირებული სფერო. მოხსენების მიზანია კულტურული მემკვიდრეობის უსაფრთხოების საკითხების შესწავლა ევროკავშირის პოლიტიკის კონტექსტში. მოხსენებაში გაანალიზებულია ის ძირითადი მექანიზმები, რომელთა საშუალებითაც ევროკავშირი ხელს უწყობს კულტურული მემკვიდრეობის დაცვასა და რისკების პრევენციას. **მეთოდები.** კვლევა ეფუძნება ევროკავშირის შესაბამისი პოლიტიკის დოკუმენტების, საერთაშორისო სამართლებრივი ჩარჩოსა და სამეცნიერო ლიტერატურის ანალიზს. განსაკუთრებული ყურადღება ეთმობა კულტურული მემკვიდრეობის დაცვის ინტეგრირებას ევროკავშირის პოლიტიკის ოთხ სფეროში: საგარეო და უსაფრთხოების პოლიტიკაში, საერთაშორისო ჰუმანიტარულ თანამშრომლობაში, კრიზისების მართვასა და მდგრადი განვითარების დღის წესრიგში. **შედეგები.** ანალიზი გამოკვეთს ევროკავშირის საქმიანობის რამდენიმე ძირითად მიმართულებას. ესენია: შეიარაღებული კონფლიქტებისა და კრიზისების შედეგად კულტურული მემკვიდრეობის დაზიანების პრევენცია და კულტურული ფასეულობების უკანონო ტრეფიკინგის წინააღმდეგ ბრძოლა. ასევე: კულტურული ობიექტების დოკუმენტირება, მათი ციფრული დაცვა და საერთაშორისო ორგანიზაციებთან და პარტნიორ სახელმწიფოებთან თანამშრომლობის ხელშეწყობა. კულტურული მემკვიდრეობა განსაკუთრებულ მნიშვნელობას იძენს მშვიდობის მშენებლობისა და კონფლიქტების ტრანსფორმაციის პროცესში. მის დაცვას შეუძლია ხელი შეუწყოს დიალოგს, ურთიერთგაგებასა და საზოგადოების სოციალური კავშირების შენარჩუნებას. ამ სფეროში ევროკავშირის პოლიტიკა მნიშვნელოვანია ევროპის სამეზობლო სივრცისა და აღმოსავლეთ პარტნიორობის ქვეყნებისთვისაც. იგი განსაკუთრებით აქტუალურია საქართველოსთვის, სადაც კულტურული მემკვიდრეობის ნაწილი კონფლიქტითა და ოკუპაციით გამოწვეული საფრთხეების წინაშე დგას (აფხაზეთი, ე.წ. სამხრეთ ოსეთი). კვლევის შედეგები აჩვენებს, რომ ევროკავშირის თანამედროვე მიდგომაში კულტურული მემკვიდრეობის უსაფრთხოება თანდათან სცდება კულტურის სფეროს ვიწრო ჩარჩოს. იგი იძენს ადამიანის უსაფრთხოების, მშვიდობის მშენებლობის, სოციალური მდგრადობისა და საერთაშორისო უსაფრთხოების განზომილებას. **დასკვნა.** კულტურული მემკვიდრეობის დაცვა შეიძლება განიხილებოდეს როგორც ევროკავშირის როგორც შიდა, ისე საგარეო პოლიტიკის მნიშვნელოვანი ინსტრუმენტი. მისი ეფექტიანობა მნიშვნელოვნად არის დამოკიდებული საერთაშორისო თანამშრომლობაზე, პრევენციულ პოლიტიკასა და ადგილობრივი საზოგადოების ჩართულობაზე. საქართველოსთვის ევროკავშირის გამოცდილება შეიძლება განხილულ იქნეს როგორც მნიშვნელოვანი რესურსი შემდეგი მიმართულებებით: კულტურული მემკვიდრეობის დაცვა, მონიტორინგი და დოკუმენტირება; ციფრული არქივის შექმნა; საერთაშორისო თანამშრომლობა; კულტურული მემკვიდრეობის წინააღმდეგ მიმართული უკანონო ქმედებების პრევენცია.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: კულტურული მემკვიდრეობა, კულტურული მემკვიდრეობის უსაფრთხოება, ევროკავშირის პოლიტიკა, კულტურული მემკვიდრეობის დაცვა, ადამიანის უსაფრთხოება, კონფლიქტი, მშვიდობის მშენებლობა, კულტურული იდენტობა, საქართველო.

Introduction

Cultural heritage constitutes one of the most important foundations of a society's historical memory, identity, and cultural continuity. Its significance extends beyond the cultural value of individual monuments, architectural structures, archaeological sites, works of art, or documentary sources. Cultural heritage brings communities together around a shared history and collective memory and plays an important role in the formation of social ties, cultural identity, and societal resilience. Accordingly, its destruction, damage, or unlawful appropriation constitutes not only a cultural problem but also a social and security concern.

The issue of cultural heritage security acquired particular importance against the backdrop of armed conflicts in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. During wars and political crises, cultural heritage sites frequently become direct or indirect targets. Their destruction may result from military operations; however, in some cases, it is deliberately employed against a society's historical memory, cultural identity, and social cohesion. The 1954 UNESCO Hague Convention established the protection of cultural property during armed conflict as an important field of international law **(UNESCO, 1954, 14.05).**

In contemporary conditions, the range of threats has become even more diverse. Alongside armed conflicts, cultural heritage is threatened by illicit archaeological excavations, the illegal export and import of cultural property, organized crime, terrorist activities, natural and technological disasters, climate change, and the risks associated with the loss of digital heritage. Consequently, the protection of cultural heritage has gradually evolved into a complex political and security issue.

Within European Union policy, the significance of cultural heritage was initially associated primarily with cultural cooperation and the development of a common European cultural space. Over time, however, this approach expanded, and the protection of cultural heritage became linked to social sustainability, international cooperation, crisis management, peacebuilding, and security policy. Article 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union identifies the conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage of European significance as one of the areas of EU action and also provides for cooperation with third countries and international organizations **(European Union, Article 167, 2012).** More specifically, the principal provisions of Article 167 include: Union Action: The EU aims to encourage cooperation between Member States and, where necessary, to support and supplement their actions in areas such as improving knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of European peoples, conserving and safeguarding cultural heritage of European significance, non-commercial cultural exchanges, and artistic and literary creation **(European Union, Article 167, 2012).**

Cooperation with Third Countries: The EU and its Member States foster cooperation with third countries and competent international organizations in the field of culture **(European Union, Article 167, 2012).**

The aim of the present paper is to examine cultural heritage security in the context of European Union policy and to analyze the principal mechanisms through which the EU contributes to the protection of cultural heritage and the prevention of related risks. Particular attention is devoted to the integration of cultural heritage protection into the EU's foreign and security policy and to the significance of this approach for Georgia.

Methods

The paper is based on a qualitative research approach and employs comparative-analytical and content-analysis methods. The principal sources of the research are official legal and policy documents of the European Union, the Council of Europe, and UNESCO addressing the protection of cultural heritage, cultural diversity, and issues of identity.

Results

The contemporary understanding of cultural heritage security is based on the premise that the protection of cultural heritage does not refer solely to the preservation of material objects. Monuments, historic cities, archaeological sites, manuscripts, museum collections, and other cultural assets are connected to the communities that created, preserved, and transmitted them across generations. Their damage or destruction therefore affects not only the cultural environment but also a society's self-perception and historical memory.

As noted above, the 1954 UNESCO Hague Convention defines the protection of cultural property during armed conflict as an independent field of international cooperation. The Convention establishes the obligation of States to protect cultural property, both in peacetime and during armed conflict, against destruction, damage, and use for purposes that may expose it to destruction **(UNESCO, 1954, 14.05).**

The First Protocol to the 1954 Hague Convention is particularly important with regard to the protection of cultural heritage in occupied territories. It prohibits the removal of cultural property from occupied territory and provides for its restitution **(UNESCO, 1954, 14.05).** This principle assumes particular significance in contemporary conflicts, as the unlawful removal of cultural heritage is often associated with processes aimed at altering identity and disrupting cultural memory.

The Second Protocol of 1999 strengthened international legal mechanisms for the protection of cultural heritage. It introduced the new category of **"enhanced protection"** for cultural property of exceptional importance and established mechanisms for sanctions and individual criminal responsibility in cases of serious violations **(UNESCO, 1999, 26.03).**

Thus, cultural heritage security is increasingly linked in contemporary international law and policy to the concept of human security. If human security entails protecting individuals and societies from various threats, the protection of cultural heritage may likewise be regarded as one component of this broader security framework, since the destruction of heritage undermines historical memory, identity, and the foundations of social cohesion.

The European Union's Cultural Heritage Policy and Security Dimension. As noted in the introduction, one of the principal legal foundations of the European Union's cultural heritage policy is Article 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. It requires the EU to respect the cultural and regional diversity of its Member States while promoting their common cultural heritage. The Article also provides for the promotion of cooperation among Member States, the conservation of cultural heritage of European significance, and cooperation with third countries and international organizations **(European Union, Article 167, 2012).**

In addition to the EU's primary treaty framework, the following documents are particularly significant from the perspective of cultural heritage security: The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union; European Commission policy documents on culture and identity; Council of the European Union conclusions on cultural heritage; and Relevant provisions of the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage.

Among UNESCO's principal conventions, in addition to the 1954 Hague Convention, particular importance should be attached to the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

Naturally, the UNESCO and European Union documents concerning cultural heritage security should be distinguished from one another. Nevertheless, taken together, these two institutional frameworks constitute a strong legal basis for ensuring effective cultural heritage security.

An important stage in the development of EU policy on cultural heritage was the European Commission's 2014 Communication, *Towards an Integrated Approach to Cultural Heritage for Europe*. The document presents cultural heritage as a common resource and a public good associated not only with culture but also with economic development, employment, and social cohesion **(European Commission, 22.07.2014).**

A further important step was the 2018 New European Agenda for Culture, which linked the protection of cultural heritage to social cohesion, well-being, and the strengthening of a common European identity. The document emphasizes the capacity of culture to promote social integration, intercultural dialogue, and societal cohesion **(European Commission, 22.05.2018).**

It is also noteworthy that Decision (EU) 2017/864 of the European Parliament and of the Council declared 2018 the **European Year of Cultural Heritage**, emphasizing the value of Europe's shared cultural heritage and presenting cultural heritage more explicitly as a common European resource. One of its objectives was to raise awareness of shared history and values and to strengthen and expand a sense of belonging to the common European space **(European Parliament and Council, 17.05.2017).**

An important aspect of the development of this common European policy is the integration of cultural heritage protection with other policy areas. The European Commission's contemporary approach links heritage not only to culture but also to education, research, environmental protection, digital transformation, tourism, and security policy. Accordingly, EU cultural heritage policy has gradually evolved into a multisectoral policy field.

A particularly significant transformation in EU policy resulted from the growing prominence of cultural heritage issues in conflicts and crises. The destruction of cultural heritage in the Middle East, the Caucasus, Asia, Africa, and other conflict-affected regions has clearly demonstrated that its protection is directly connected with peace and security. In 2015, the European Union strongly condemned the deliberate destruction of archaeological and cultural heritage in Syria and Iraq by the so-called Islamic State and noted that such acts could, under certain circumstances, constitute elements of war crimes **(Council of the European Union, 16.03.2015).** This experience contributed to strengthening the security dimension of cultural heritage protection within EU policy.

In this regard, particular importance was attached to the EU's 2021 document, *Concept on Cultural Heritage in Conflicts and Crises: A Component for Peace and Security in European Union's External Action*. This document provides a practical framework for addressing cultural heritage in conflicts and crises and establishes its protection as a component of peace and security within the EU's external action.

The Concept placed cultural heritage protection within the broader framework of EU external action, peace, and security **(Council of the European Union, 18.06.2021).** On 21 June of the same year, the Council of the European Union adopted relevant conclusions in which the protection of cultural heritage was directly linked to the promotion of peace, democracy, and sustainable development. The Council also recognized that cultural heritage may be used as a factor contributing to or a target of conflict, while at the same time acknowledging its potential to promote tolerance, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, mutual understanding, and societal resilience **(Council of the European Union, 21.06.2021).**

This approach is also significant because the European Union has incorporated cultural heritage protection into the entire conflict cycle - from conflict prevention and early warning through preparedness and response to post-crisis recovery and peacebuilding.

Accordingly, on the basis of the documents discussed above, the European Union's approach is grounded in the principle of prevention. Cultural heritage security does not merely involve the restoration of already damaged monuments; it encompasses prior risk assessment, documentation, inventorying, professional training, the development of emergency plans, and international cooperation.

Illicit Trafficking in Cultural Property. One of the major contemporary threats to cultural heritage is the illicit trafficking of cultural property. Objects obtained through illegal archaeological excavations in conflict zones may enter international markets and ultimately end up in private collections or illicit markets. In this area, the European Union has established an important legal mechanism through the 2019 **Regulation (EU) 2019/880 on the introduction and the import of cultural goods**.

The purpose of the Regulation is to restrict the illicit trade in cultural property and to protect the cultural heritage of humanity. The document directly links the fight against illicit trafficking to the prevention of terrorist financing and money-laundering risks **(European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 7.07.2019).**

The significance of this Regulation increased particularly from 28 June 2025, when the relevant obligations concerning import licences or importer statements became applicable and a centralized electronic system for the exchange of information concerning cultural goods became operational **(European Parliament and Council, 17.04.2019).**

This aspect of EU policy is complemented by the 2022 Action Plan against Trafficking in Cultural Goods**,** which aims to improve the prevention and detection of crime, strengthen the capacities of law-enforcement and judicial authorities, and enhance international cooperation, including with countries of origin and transit of cultural property located in conflict and crisis situations **(European Commission, 13.12.2022).**

Consequently, cultural heritage protection policy is directly connected with the European Union's policies for combating organized crime and terrorism. This represents a significant transformation: cultural heritage is no longer regarded solely as an object of historical and cultural policy but has become part of the broader international security agenda.

At the contemporary stage, new technologies create not only new opportunities for cultural heritage protection but also new responsibilities. Digital documentation of cultural sites, 3D modelling, photogrammetry, geospatial data, and digital archives are particularly important for regions where cultural heritage is exposed to the risks of war, occupation, or natural disasters.

Digital documentation makes it possible to create an accurate record of the condition of a cultural site and, in the event of damage, provides the data necessary for research and the reconstruction of its authentic appearance. At the same time, digital archives are important for identifying cultural heritage, establishing ownership and provenance, and combating illicit trafficking. In contemporary EU policy, the digital dimension of cultural heritage is associated with access to cultural resources, research, education, and the preservation of heritage in emergency situations. In this respect, digital technologies may be regarded as a preventive instrument for cultural heritage security.

Cultural Heritage Security and Georgia

The issue of cultural heritage security within the European Union's policy framework is of particular importance in the case of Georgia. Part of Georgia's historical and cultural heritage is located in territories that, as a result of conflict and occupation, remain beyond the effective control of Georgia's central government. Consequently, the protection of cultural heritage is linked not only to cultural policy but also to documentation, monitoring, international law, and the peaceful transformation of conflicts.

Georgia has been a UNESCO Member State since 7 October 1992 and has ratified the principal conventions in the fields of culture and education. Among these, Georgia has ratified the 1954 Hague Convention and its 1954 and 1999 Protocols, as well as the 1970 Convention concerning the prohibition of and measures against the illicit import, export, and transfer of ownership of cultural property **(UNESCO, Georgia – Conventions).** It is noteworthy that, out of 43 UNESCO conventions, Georgia has ratified 16, while it has not ratified certain conventions relating to Latin American, African, and Asian countries. This constitutes a significant legal framework and provides an important foundation for international cooperation in the protection of Georgia's cultural heritage.

In the context of Georgia's conflicts, EU policy is particularly significant because of the European Union's broader peace and security policy. The EU participates in the peaceful settlement of Georgia's conflicts, including through its co-chairmanship of the Geneva International Discussions and through the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM). Official EU statements have consistently expressed support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

In this regard, one of the most recent significant expressions of support was contained in statements issued in August 2026, in which the European External Action Service (EEAS) once again condemned Russia's recognition of the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and stated that Russia's continued military presence in these territories without the consent of the Government of Georgia is unlawful and violates international law. According to the EU statement, Russia is seeking to integrate Abkhazia and South Ossetia *de facto* into Russian regulatory and security structures. The statement also referred to the so-called "Agreement on Deepening Allied and Cooperative Relations" signed between Moscow and Tskhinvali on 9 May 2026 and stated that the appointment of a Russian official as the so-called "acting president" of South Ossetia has "no legal force under international law" **(EU calls, 10.08.2026).**

From the perspective of cultural heritage protection, this context is important for Georgia because, under conditions of conflict, cultural heritage security is directly linked to the possibilities for international monitoring, documentation, information exchange, and the involvement of international organizations. The EU experience is particularly relevant for Georgia in four areas: **First**, the digital documentation and protection of cultural heritage data; **Second**, the prevention of illicit trafficking in cultural property; **Third**, the strengthening of international cooperation and professional networks; and **Fourth**, the use of cultural heritage in confidence-building and peacebuilding processes.

From this perspective, cultural heritage may serve not only as an object of protection but also as a resource for peacebuilding. Emphasizing the shared significance of cultural heritage, promoting the scholarly study of historical memory, and encouraging cultural dialogue can contribute to maintaining communication between communities.

Conclusion

Cultural heritage security has become an important component of the contemporary international political and security agenda. Its significance has become particularly evident in the context of armed

conflicts, political crises, occupation, terrorism, organized crime, and the illicit trafficking of cultural property. The European Union's experience demonstrates that the protection of cultural heritage has gradually extended beyond the traditional framework of cultural policy. From the cultural provisions of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, through the 2014 integrated approach and the 2018 New European Agenda for Culture, to the 2021 Concept on Cultural Heritage in Conflicts and Crises, EU policy indicates an expanding understanding of the significance of cultural heritage.

Particular importance should be attached to the European Union's linking of cultural heritage protection with peace, security, social resilience, and conflict transformation. The 2021 Council conclusions further reinforced this approach and established a direction for integrating cultural heritage protection into relevant instruments of the EU's foreign and security policy **(Council of the European Union, 21.06.2021).**

The legal and institutional mechanisms established by the European Union to combat the illicit trafficking of cultural property represent another important area. The 2019 Regulation and the 2022 Action Plan connect the protection of cultural heritage with efforts to combat organized crime, terrorist financing, and international illicit markets. This experience of the European Union is particularly relevant for Georgia. A part of the country's cultural heritage is exposed to heightened risks as a result of conflict and occupation.

Taking the above considerations into account, cultural heritage security can be understood as **an interdisciplinary field at the intersection of culture, human security, peacebuilding, and international security**. Ensuring its effective protection requires not only the efforts of individual states, but also the coordinated participation of the European Union, UNESCO, other international organizations, professional associations, and local communities. It is precisely such multilevel cooperation that creates the conditions for cultural heritage to be protected as a legacy of the past while, at the same time, being used as a resource for building a peaceful, sustainable, and mutually understanding-oriented future.

If our argument is valid, then **the protection of cultural heritage under contemporary conditions should no longer be viewed solely as a matter of cultural policy**. From this perspective, culture, historical memory, identity, social resilience, human security, peace, and international security, taken together, constitute a broader concept of human security and provide the basis for developing an integrated conceptual understanding of cultural heritage security. According to this approach, the protection of cultural heritage can be understood not only as a component of cultural policy, but also as an interconnected component of human security, social resilience, peacebuilding, and international security.

As demonstrated above, the European Union's cultural heritage security policy has gradually and progressively evolved. It can be argued that this policy has undergone an evolutionary development, with approaches to the issue becoming increasingly comprehensive and forward-looking over time. This evolution can also be viewed as a cyclical progression: cultural cooperation, protection of cultural heritage, social resilience, crisis management, conflict prevention, peace, and security. The 2014 integrated approach, the 2018 New European Agenda for Culture, and, particularly, the 2021 Concept provide a strong basis for tracing this evolution. In our view, the evolution of the European Union's cultural heritage policy can be systematized as a development from the sphere of cultural cooperation toward a policy dimension contributing to peace and security. The study demonstrates that, within the EU's contemporary approach, cultural heritage has gradually developed into a multisectoral policy area closely interconnected with security policy.

At the same time, the analysis of the relevant documents reveals the concept of the "dual function" of cultural heritage. Cultural heritage can simultaneously be: (a) a target of conflict and (b) a resource for peacebuilding. The European Union's 2021 approach recognizes that cultural heritage may be instrumentalized as a factor contributing to conflict or may itself become a target of conflict; at the same time, however, it can contribute to tolerance, dialogue, and mutual understanding. This perspective may provide the basis for a new analytical model: Cultural Heritage as Both a Security Vulnerability and a Peacebuilding Resource.

In the context of Georgia, four areas are of particular importance: 1. digital documentation of cultural heritage; 2. prevention of illicit trafficking; 3. international cooperation and professional networks; and 4. the use of cultural heritage in confidence-building and peacebuilding. On this basis, we propose an EU–Georgia Cultural Heritage Security Framework and formulate a multidimensional framework for adapting the European Union's cultural heritage security policy to the Georgian context. This framework should encompass risk assessment for Georgia's cultural heritage sites, digital documentation, inventory and data protection, prevention of illicit trafficking, strengthening international and professional cooperation, and the training of specialists, particularly those working with cultural heritage sites located in conflict-affected

regions. It should also promote the use of cultural heritage in confidence-building and peacebuilding processes.

This approach may be conceptualized as a **"Preventive Cultural Heritage Security Model."** Such a model is particularly important for Georgia because, under conditions of conflict and occupation, the concept of "protection" alone is insufficient; rather, it requires advance documentation, risk assessment, prevention, and systematic risk management.

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