Recommendation 921 (1981)[1]

Metal detectors and archaeology

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Having considered the report of its Committee on Culture and Education on metal detectors and archaeology (Doc. 4741) ;

2. Concerned at the growing threat to the archaeological heritage caused by the increasing marketing of metal detectors in Europe and their uncontrolled widespread use ;

3. Considering that this is but one aspect of a general misunderstanding of the principles of archaeology and of the nature of the archaeological heritage ;

4. Regretting in particular the notion of "treasure hunting" applied to the search for this heritage and all advertising to this effect ;

5. Stressing the importance of co-operation between the members of the public, archaeologists and dealers in antiquities or metal detectors ;

6. Welcoming the public interest in archaeology, but wishing to encourage this interest through the greater involvement of a responsible public in archaeology and better appreciation of the evidence archaeological research can reveal ;

7. Insisting on the need for the strict observance of archaeological practice in any excavation, prospection or other disturbance of traces of human existence ;

8. Regretting the inadequacy of qualified personnel and resources to cope with the number of archaeological sites calling for examination ;

9. Concerned that existing legislation in most member states, or its implementation, is far from sufficient to prevent or control destruction of the archaeological heritage, or even stem its increase ;

10. Anxious that such states as are reviewing their heritage legislation should take specific account of the problems created by public use of metal detectors ;

11. Recalling the 1968 European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage ;

12. Recalling its Recommendation 848 (1978), on the underwater cultural heritage ;

13. Recalling Resolution No. VI of the Second Conference of European Ministers responsible for Cultural Affairs, which called for Council of Europe action on the European archaeological heritage, and wishing to include the problem of metal detectors in any follow-up given to this resolution,

14. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers :

14.1. ensure that the European Convention being drafted on offences relating to works of art, covers explicitly the offence of the unauthorised use of metal detectors in prospection ;

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1. See Doc. 4741, report of the Committee on Culture and Education. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 1er July 1981.

14.2. consider adopting, as a matter of urgency, recommendations to governments for the licensing or registration of users of metal detectors ;

14.3. launch an information campaign on archaeology to be co-ordinated by the Council of Europe, aimed at the general public, at governments and commercial dealers in antiquities and metal detectors ;

14.4. examine the application of the European Archaeological Convention of 1968, with a view to its possible revision and strengthening ;

14.5. ask member governments or other competent authorities :

a. to support the inclusion of an introduction to archaeology in school education as part of historical studies, in order to encourage a more responsible attitude to the evidence of the past ;

b. to allocate increased resources to archaeology, and augment employment possibilities for archaeologists ;

c. to supplement existing legislation to ensure, where still necessary, the full protection of all archaeological remains, surface included ;

d. to examine critically the wisdom of permitting advertising or any other incentives to hunt for archaeological treasure ;

e. to prepare, in collaboration with archaeologists and detector manufacturers, information booklets explaining current legislation relating to metal detectors and giving guidelines on their use, and to arrange for such booklets to be distributed with every metal detector sold to the public ;

f. to encourage museums, archaeologists and archaeological societies to establish and maintain contacts with local detector users, and to involve them, where possible, in excavations under competent supervision.