

## Conserving cultural heritage, Europe

### Common solutions and standards for the profession

*Forty specialists from across Europe present Brussels with their recommendations expected to be translated into a Directive within five years*

PAVIA. The difficulties of maintaining and restoring the cultural heritage are no respecters of national boundaries. And so the problems faced by conservators across Europe are striking in their similarity: the lack of national registers for the profession; the need to recognise the autonomy of the individual restorer; and, above all, the need for adequate training.

This month, a document drawn up by forty European experts with recommendations for practical working solutions is to be presented to the European Commission.

It follows a conference held at the University of Pavia in October where invited specialists worked behind closed doors to set out guidelines for European standards governing the conservation of the cultural heritage. It is expected that these recommendations will be trans-

lated into a Directive within five years. The document has already been circulated to all European institutes of conservation, with a request that its recommendations be followed.

The two-page document itself is phrased in vague terms—to be expected, perhaps, of guidelines that are to serve for restorers working as far apart as Aberdeen and Palermo. While certain problems are indeed shared by all those in the profession, the particularities of each European country will dictate the way in which conservators attempt to move forward.

One of the conference's main themes, the question of standards in education and training, is, on the whole, more pressing in Mediterranean countries such as Italy, than in countries such as the UK. In Italy, a proliferation of unauthorised courses claiming to offer adequate training and lasting in some cases as little as three days, puts strict legislation at the top of the agenda for the country's conservators.

The recognition of conservation as an autonomous profession on a par with the medical or legal profession is seen as essential for standards to be

maintained. Here, British conservators lead the field by a long way. Most professional bodies work under the umbrella tutelage of the Conservation Forum which is working towards accreditation for the profession. Conservators in other countries will have to organise themselves from scratch.

Finally, the conference called for increasing awareness at a political level. Each country will have to approach the powers that be in the most appropriate way, through quangos or lobbying.

The conference is part of a

series of European initiatives. According to one of the specialists on the steering committee for the conference, Carole Milner of the UK's Museums and Galleries Commission, the momentum for change is given by the growing concern at the impact of the contract culture on the preservation of the cultural heritage. Where market-driven competition and tendering offer the possibility of choosing the cheapest option, fears are mounting that it is far too easy for untrained individuals to handle works of art.

The Pavia conference was

organised by the Associazione Giovanni Secco Suardo for the conservation of the national heritage, with funding from the EU, the Ministero per i Beni Culturali and the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche. Participants from other European countries include the Ecole Nationale du Patrimoine—Ifoa, Paris St Denis; the Hamilton Kerr Institute, the University of Cambridge; the Hochschule für Bildende Kunst, Dresden; the Museums and Galleries Commission of the Université Libre de Bruxelles, Section d'Histoire del'Art et d'Archéologie. C.R.