



When the cave of Praileaitz was discovered, we started to work hard in order to protect this "little" cave located near a "little" village in the Basque Country. Then, we realized that there was not any special law that would keep this wonderful historical, cultural and environmental heritage from being destroyed, so we looked up, to Europe. While trying to find any other associations in Europe that would also take care of this kind of matters, we found out that there was a big lack of communication between different organisms that would work on the same issues. We contacted a few of them, and made a meeting at the European Parliament in order to talk about the need of protection of the caves in their very different aspects.

That is how our "European Forum of Caves and Karst Environment Protection" was born. And its first deed was the Written Declaration on Protection of caves as a cultural, natural and environmental Heritage. It is necessary to make all we can, each of us in our field, to make people realize that when a cave is being closed, thousands of years of history are being erased forever, but not only this, a wonderful habitat for different rare specimens of fauna, a natural reservoir of water resources, a marvellous environment *sub terrae* are gone. That is why we support the entire silent but continuous work is being done by the specialists involved, such as speleologist, archaeologists, biologist, climatologists, palaeontologists... and a vast etcetera.

Therefore, it is a pleasure for me to come to this first symposium, as I believe it is important to give the first step, which sometimes is the hardest one, but it is also important to make a good job and continue with it. Thank you very much for having taken all this job to prepare a needed big meeting like the one in Vercors, and let's work together for a second, a third... until we achieve our common goal; make people realize how rich is this planet, both the part we see, and the part we don't .



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