Cultural heritage has an important role in sustaining communities: it strengthens cultural identity and feeling of belonging; creates economic benefits for example through tourism; and reinforces sustainability in broader ecological and environmental terms. Heritage conservation is commonly included to the idea of sustainable development. Since the idea and concept of cultural heritage is extremely fluid, ambiguous, and emotionally charged, the attempts to sustain and preserve it easily gain a political dimension. During the past decade, the transcultural and transnational dimensions of heritage have become topical in a new way in Europe: the idea and the concept of a common European cultural heritage have been more and more frequently referred to in the political discourses and practices of the EU. The European Commission has recently launched and currently administrates or supports several cultural initiatives, which aim to foster the idea of a common European cultural heritage. The concept of cultural heritage is also often used in EU policy sections other than culture. The paper discusses the explicit and implicit heritage politics included in the recent EU heritage initiatives and their policy discourse. The main questions in the paper are: What kind of heritage politics does the EU promote and implement through its heritage initiatives; and how and why does the EU aim to govern the cultural heritage in Europe? In order to understand the constructive and generative nature of the EU’s heritage politics, it is approached in the paper as a discursive meaning-making process that consists of several political aims, strategies for obtaining them, and the underlying ideologies on which the aims and the strategies are based upon. In the paper, the EU heritage politics is understood as a form of governance which aims at governing both heritage agencies and the cultural meanings of heritage in Europe.

Keywords: cultural heritage, governance, European Union, heritage politics