

Europa Nostra
International secretariat
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Netherlands

Copy:
Europa Nostra Sverige
Culture Heritage without Borders Kosovo
Culture Heritage without Borders Bosnien and Herzegovina
Culture Heritage without Borders Albania

Dear Sirs/Madams,

We are writing to You to get some more information concerning the reasons behind Your decision to include the *Manastir Visoki Dečani / Manastiri i Deçanit* in Kosovo to the *List of 7 most endangered Heritage Sites in Europe*.

This listing has come to our knowledge through our sister organisation, Cultural Heritage without Borders Kosovo. They sent You a letter dated 17 December 2020 to inquire about the background to the decision. In the letter they pointed out what they feel are misconceptions, asking for a new inquiry including contact with all concerned authorities/organizations in Serbia as well as in Kosovo. For what we have been informed, the authorities/-organizations in Kosovo have not been involved in the discussions preceding the listing of 7 most endangered sites. We are surprised to discover that even after a meeting on 15 February 2021, the listing still stands and no steps to revise the listing seem to be under consideration?

It is commonly known and accepted that the situation is still complicated for many of the cultural heritage sites in Kosovo and other countries in the Balkans. Cultural Heritage without Borders was founded in 1995, in connection to the war in the 1990s which destroyed many cultural sites and made heritage into a political issue. We have since then been involved in many projects in the area trying to save and protect the cultural heritage as a mean for peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

It is of paramount importance that everything in our power is done to avoid anything that can be interpreted as a possible polarization of cultural heritage in Kosovo. The Serbian side reacting to reports of threats to this monastery is understandable. None the less, facts must guide the process of listing endangered heritage. Facts must be established: reports on threats must be thoroughly investigated and confirmed by independent parties, visits to the sites made, arguments collected from different parties and sides, etc. We know Europa Nostra as an organization committed to this way of operating and urge You to act swift and in a transparent way also in this case, and start a revising process. If all partners/stakeholders are involved, we are sure that some of the now pointed out risks and dangers can be clarified and avoided.

In this manner conflicts can be prevented, and social cohesion enhanced, instead of – as now – creating conflicts.

The importance of the *Manastir Visoki Dečani / Manastiri i Deçanit* – global common heritage for all, to be respected by all, today and for future generations, was underlined when in 2004 the site was inscribed on the World Heritage List. In 2006, it was extended to include three more churches

– *Medieval Monuments in Kosovo*. At the same time, due to the unstable political situation, it was put on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

If the assessment of this nomination by the Europa Nostra Advisory Panel, published on 10 December 2020 is based on data that is unverified, and later perhaps even proved to be misleading, this is a very worrying sign that cultural heritage in the name of Europa Nostra is used for political purposes. The right to culture is a Human Right and it is important that this is respected by all communities living in an area.

Culture Heritage without Borders Sweden / Kulturarv utan Gränser Sverige
Stockholm May 11th 2021

Birgitta Johansen
Chairman

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Vice Chairman

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