



**The Non-Governmental Organization Emancipimi Civil Ma Ndryshe
EC MA NDRYSHE**

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PRESS RELEASE

The government should draft a state agenda for the cultural heritage

Groups of citizens and civil society organizations, in the last few months, in several cities of Kosovo have given concrete evidence of activism for the protection of their cities, respectively their cultural heritage. These reactions have prompted the state authorities to take corrective actions regarding these cases.

In Vushtrri, following the reaction of local activists, the Ministry of Culture has canceled a dubious contract, signed in a non-transparent way with a private company for the management of the City Castle.

In a similar case, a few days before this event, cultural organizations in Peja were very vocal, affecting the cobblestone to return in a part of the city square, despite the fact that central and local authorities were negligent in finding stones during the constructions.

In Prizren, cultural heritage activists have ultimately impacted on reaching an agreement between local and central authorities, civil society and international donors for the revitalization of the "Marin Barleti" street in the Historic Center of Prizren. Last year, in that same street, the collapse of an old house caused the death of a three-year-old child.

Whereas in Mitrovica, civil society activists and groups of citizens have long been mobilized to defend the house of Xhafer Deva and the house of the former Army. In both cases, the state authorities have shown readiness and are expected to take actions to protect these buildings.

There are also some cases, including reactivating the component of emergency interventions to the monuments at risk, adopting the National Cultural Heritage Strategy (and activating the Small Grants Scheme), the Museum of Natural History, among others, creating a positive attitude of state authorities' approach to cultural heritage.

One of the important challenges remains to prioritize and increase the efficiency of the authorities responsible for the inventory of cultural heritage buildings throughout the territory of Kosovo, which is an inevitable measure for their conservation and protection. Thus, the registration and documentation of cultural heritage buildings would also provide the basis for evaluating whether they have legal protection or not. Moreover, it would help to avoid cases of the demolition of old houses and other public facilities, such as the example in Peja, where the first school of applied arts in Kosovo was demolished with the authorization of local authorities.

In the aforementioned cases, civic activism, which in some cities is a consistent action in recent years, has also managed to activate the state mechanisms that have the mandate to protect and develop the cultural heritage.

EC considers that these are the first signs for a serious state approach towards cultural heritage. However, due to systematic degradation, dealing with the consequences is a process that requires a great deal of long-term commitment from state authorities.

Calling on some positive response from the authorities this year, EC believes in the opportunity to set the cultural heritage up high to state priorities. For this reason, it calls on state authorities, primarily the Government of Kosovo, to draft an urgent state agenda for cultural heritage, which would encourage the mobilization of all state and social capacities.

Part of this state agenda for cultural heritage should be at least the following actions or priorities:

- Drafting and implementation of management plans for all cultural heritage assets that are under state protection;
- Full functionalization of the permanent legal protection of cultural heritage assets, and thus to end the practice of temporary protection;
- The Government, respectively MCYS, should be much more coordinated with the local authorities (municipalities) on the protection, management and promotion of cultural heritage assets;
- MCYS must establish consultative mechanisms with civil society regarding cultural heritage;
- MCYS must initiate an open and constructive dialogue with private owners of cultural heritage assets that are in temporary protection in order to protect the cultural heritage and support the owners in question;
- Prioritize and increase the efficiency of the authorities responsible for inventorying the cultural heritage objects;
- The full implementation of the law on the criminal offense 'monuments damage' (including a more active role of justice bodies which should increase the level of responsibility in this regard);
- Commitment to a worthy application and a transparent process for the UNESCO membership;
- Restoration of the remaining Orthodox churches which were damaged in 2004;
- Approval and implementation of the management plan of the 'Ulpiana' archaeological site;
- Prioritization and professional handling of newly discovered archaeological locations
- Adopt and implement the management plans for Kosovo's Historic Centers.

The project "Spatial Planning Transparency in Prizren" aims to open the spatial planning documents of Prizren, in order to meet the obligations of the Charter for Opening Data, and to increase the level of public accountability in this sector. The opening of the database and of the spatial planning documents will create greater opportunities for supervising the work of public authorities in relation to urban planning, building permits, development planning and management of cultural heritage.

Sincerely,
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