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PRESS RELEASE

Issues related to works in Great Hamam of Prishtina seem to have no end

Within the “Online Transparency” project, EC Ma Ndryshe during June–September launched a research on conservation and restoration works in cultural heritage buildings in Prishtina. After noting numerous problems that are accompanying the works in both Çarshia (Bazaar) Mosque and Jashar Pasha’s Mosque, the research continues to look at the conservation works of Prishtina’s Great Hamam.

Commitment about the restoration of the Great Hamam came in advent of 2006, whereby the CHwB (Cultural Heritage without Borders) and the Municipality of Prishtina signed a Memorandum of Understanding. Part of the agreement was the setting up of a Project Board, composed of the representatives from the Municipality, CHwB, IPCM (Institute for Protection of Monuments of Kosovo) and the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture. This Board was assigned with the task of drafting the restoration program of the Great Hamam.

In 2007–2008, CHwB took over to implement a part of the first phase of the project that included the cleaning of the Hamam and temporary covering, while the municipality funded emergency consolidation of the building.

Following this phase, under the funding by the CHwB, the drafting of the conservation and restoration plan of the Hamam started off by Mustafa Pehlivanoglu, architect from Turkey, whereas the supervision of drafting the plan was entrusted to the expert, Zeynep Ahunbay, architect. In addition to the Project Board, a Board of Experts was also established, that was in charge to provide professional advice regarding the project. In 2009, upon its completion, conservation plan was approved by the Project Board and by the IPCM, which, at the same time, was the body supervising project execution.

The second phase of the project started in 2009 and foresaw consolidation of the domes of Hamam. For this phase were assigned a total of about € 300,000 of which € 50,000 were allocated from the MCYS, while the rest was allocated by the municipality. However, with the beginning of the implementation of the second phase, the Hamam saw the first setbacks. Many of the stakeholders involved in the project expressed dissatisfaction with the manner of implementation of the project. At the time the Board of Experts was dissolved.

The first discontent had to do with the company contracted for execution of works deriving from the restoration plan. According to the CHwB, the company selected by the municipality had no adequate experience in conservation works. The winning company had engaged experts

from the IPCM for execution of works, while at the same time the IPCM was also assigned in overseeing the project.

In addition to this, the main concern was that works on the ground had gone astray from the original restoration plan due to the lack of adequate supervision by IPCM and the municipality. No suggestions were taken into account neither those made by the Board of Experts after many visits that were made to the building. Concerns about departures from the plan were also corroborated by the author of the project, Mustafa Pehlivanoglu, architect, who had requested to immediately stop the works thus to assess the damage inflicted to the building.

Project coordinator, Arch. Zeynep Ahunbay, had also voiced her harsh reaction through a report in which she had numbered deviations that were made on the monument. Even the then Ambassador of the OSCE in Kosovo had urged the municipality for termination of works in the hammam.

However, regardless of numerous criticisms, restoration works in Hamam proceeded until 7 February 2013, when the MCYS rendered a decision to stop restoration works. This decision came after the finding by the Commission for Review and Assessment of Cultural Heritage Requests – Restoration/Conservation Projects (Cultural Heritage Commission) that works in Hamam were realized contrary to the Law on Cultural Heritage and contrary to professional standards for restoration and conservation.

MCYS had engaged an expert from Tirana for examination of mortar used on interior walls. Upon receipt of results, MCYS rendered a decision to remove this mortar and to use another kind of mortar, respecting the proper formulation. According to this decision, continuation of supervision of works should be done by a RCCH's expert (formerly IPCM) of Prishtina.

In early 2013, the Kosovo Council for the Cultural Heritage (KCCH) had analysed the works in the Hamam, by preparing a report on the worrisome state of the works, which then it had sent to MCYS. KCCH, among others, had assessed that the integrity and the authenticity of the monument was hurt as a result of unprofessional interventions during the years 2009–2013.

The third phase of works, in addition to the consolidation of interior and exterior walls, constructing the roof in the part of the fountain, plastering and whitewashing, included also the electrical cabling. The works of this phase went on until the beginning of this year when, due to failure to eliminate the moisture on the walls the plaster began to flake from exterior walls. Hence, after the site visit by the MCYS, the Directorate of Culture and the Directorate of Urbanism, Prishtina Municipality requested from the MCYS to suspend restorative works. The municipality had decided to establish an Assessment Committee in order to review to date works of the project, to come up afterward with the recommendations for continuation of works. According to the director of the Cultural Heritage Department in MCYS, Mrs. Vjollca Aliu, the MCYS is pending the decision of the Municipality about the continuation of the works.

Almost nine months have passed until today since the last suspension of works, whereas the Municipality has not yet established the committee for assessing of works.

Given these, EC Ma Ndryshe recommends to establish as soon as possible this Committee, in order to assess the works and undertake required measures depending on the outcome of the assessment.

At the very end, EC Ma Ndryshe would like to recall the responsible municipal and state institutions that, according to the Law on Cultural Heritage (Law No. 02/L-88, 2006), Article 4.10. *“Each legal and physical person has duty of care to safeguard the integrity of Cultural Heritage if he/she is owner, possessor or occupier of this Cultural Heritage.”* Therefore, it is the last moment for these institutions to engage jointly and with responsibility in taking steps to stop serious degradation that is already taken place by unprofessional interventions. The dragging in the establishment of the Assessment Committee by the municipality, but also and the lack of inter-institutional collaboration in this delicate moment in which the Great Hamam of Prishtina is found (as in the case of the Çarshia [Bazaar] Mosque in Prishtina), for consequence have the stalling of the restoration process thus higher risk of further degradation.

EC Ma Ndryshe’s project for overseeing transparency of the Municipality of Prishtina shall continue with publicizing monitoring findings through regular press releases and the project’s website, where the findings will be posted directly by the monitors. All monitoring findings, including regular press releases and other information in relation to the local government of Prishtina will be regularly published on the project’s website: www.online-transparency.org.

Thank you,

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