

Interregional Non-Governmental Organisation
The National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)

6, Zoi i Alexandra Kosmodemjanskikh Str., Moscow, 125171, Tel/Fax + 7 499 747 41 79
e-mail: rncomos@gmail.com website: <http://www.icomos.org.ru/>
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To the Director of the World Heritage Centre
Dr. Mechtild Rössler

Dear Mrs. Rössler,

This letter is to turn the attention of the World Heritage Centre to the problem of the under-construction Lakhta Centre sky-scraper that is a threat to the integrity of the World Heritage object 'Historic Centre of Saint Petersburg and Related Groups of Monuments'.

A new dominating structure has emerged within city panoramas and panoramas of palace and park complexes of the environs of St. Petersburg. In its architecture and semantics, this dominating structure contradicts the historic landscape of St. Petersburg.

In 2011, as per decision of its 36th session, the World Heritage Committee suggested that the Russian Federation present a detailed assessment of the impact of the construction project on the heritage before taking a final decision about constructing the sky-scraper. The assessment was to be carried out in accordance with the ICOMOS Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties. Some time before, this suggestion was advanced in a letter of the Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre Kishore Rao addressed to the Russian envoy to the UNESCO Mrs Eleonora Mitrofanova (25.10.2011 Ref :WHC/74/4449/RU/AS/KR).

However, this suggestion had not been followed, and on August, 17, 2012, the Government of St. Petersburg approved the construction project.

In April, 2013, having taken the current situation into consideration, the St. Petersburg Regional Branch of the ICOMOS Russian National Committee (ICOMOS SPb) gave its assessment of the construction project.

The main findings of this assessment are as follows:

The overall impact of the Lakhta Centre sky-scraper on the outstanding universal value of the property on the World Heritage List can be characterized as predominantly NEGATIVE. Such an important feature of the object as its integrity will also be compromised, since a never-before-seen dominating structure will emerge within the panoramas of the city.

The construction in this place is only possible under the condition that its high-rise part level is decreased to 123-133 meters' mark, which would make the building indiscernible from central districts of the city and from Ol'gino (taking the screening function of the green planting into account). When observing the seascape from scenery spots of the former imperial residences alongside the Peterhof highway, the dominating role of the office complex within the Neva Bay panoramas would decrease to a reasonable limit.

The outcomes of the assessment and the minutes of the meeting of the Council of the ICOMOS SPb in support of this assessment of April, 23, 2013, were sent to the governor of

St. Petersburg Georgy S. Poltavchenko, who did not reply. In September, 2013, the findings of the assessment were presented at the meeting of the International Committee on Historic Towns and Villages (CCIVVIH) of the ICOMOS in Budapest, where they were fully approved. In the same 2013, these materials were presented on the web-site of the ICOMOS SPb (<http://icomos-spb.ru/nasha-deyatelnost/otsenka-proekta-lakhta-tsentra>).

At the moment, the governance of Gazprom is going forward with the construction, the calls of the World Heritage Committee and hence the UNESCO being completely ignored. This being said, Mrs. E. Mitrofanova, who is not a specialist in the field, has repeatedly taken the liberty of publicly assessing the city-planning situation in respect to the Lakhta Centre and its 'safety' for the city landscape and voicing confidence in that no negative consequences of behalf of the UNESCO would follow.

Up to the present day, her mollifying remarks can be found on the official web-site of the Lakhta-centre (<http://lakhta.center/ru/article/?id=1073>; <http://lakhta.center/ru/relations/expert/>).

On July, 15, 2015, Sergey B. Gorbatenko and Pavel N. Nikonov sent a letter to the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir V. Putin in which they asked to stop the construction and to take a final decision on the planned building parameters after passing all the international professional procedures that would confirm or disprove the findings and recommendations put forward in our assessment. However, the letter did not reach the President: a run-around reply was sent by the chair of the office of a vice-governor of St. Petersburg, a low-level official.

In the late 2015, the authors sent a letter to the the World Heritage Centre and asked to pass their assessment to the ICOMOS and, in case their findings and recommendations are supported, to address to the relevant authorities of the Russian Federation with a plea to revise the project. They have received a mere confirmation of the receiving of the letter. No further measures have been taken by the Centre.

At the moment, the sky-scraper is only erected half-height, but it has already become a sufficient accent within panoramas of the historic centre of St. Petersburg (which includes the panoramas seen from the Hermitage windows), of Strel'na, Peterhof and many other components of the World Heritage object. We suggest that a meeting of the representatives of the World Heritage Centre, the ICOMOC, responsible authorities of the Russian Federation and of St. Petersburg and international experts is summoned in order to discuss and assess the situation at hand. We are of the opinion that after the sky-scraper is completed, St. Petersburg as the World Heritage object can face the prospective of being included into the List of World Heritage in Danger.

The President of the National Committee
of the ICOMOS, Russia,
Academician

Alexander P. Kudryavtsev