



EUROPA NOSTRA STATEMENT

Protecting Belgrade's Generalštab is a Matter of Law and Public Interest

[Europa Nostra](#), the leading European heritage civil society network, covering over 40 countries, and working closely with the European Union, the Council of Europe and UNESCO, expresses its deep concern over ongoing reports of plans by the Serbian authorities to sign an agreement with a private company allowing the demolition of the historically significant General Staff and Ministry of Defense Complex (Generalštab) in Belgrade, Serbia, and its subsequent replacement by a new building serving private sector interests. This proposed action threatens a protected cultural monument and raises serious concerns regarding the state of preservation of cultural heritage and the respect of the rule of law in Serbia.

The Generalštab is a masterpiece of **Serbian, Yugoslav, and European modernist architecture**. Designed by the renowned architect **Nikola Dobrović** and completed in the 1960s, this architectural ensemble stands as an iconic symbol of the urban landscape in the historic centre of Belgrade. After having suffered serious damage during the NATO bombing in 1999, this protected building has been waiting - for 25 years - for a proper plan for its preservation and rehabilitation.

Today, the proposed demolition of the Generalštab by a private real-estate development company would not only erase a unique piece of cultural heritage, which confirms the past and present artistic connections between Belgrade and Europe, but would also set a dangerous precedent for future protection and management of other heritage sites in Serbia.

The General Staff and Ministry of Defense Complex is under strong **legal protection** by Serbian law: it is recognised as a cultural monument of unique value. The announcement and initial images of plans for new real estate development to be built by a private company on this site disregards these protections, as well as **Serbia's obligations under the international and European conventions** that the country ratified.

Therefore, in the days and weeks when Serbia and Europe are celebrating European Heritage Days, Europa Nostra stands in solidarity with more than **350 experts and numerous cultural institutions** who have joined their voices and forces and have mobilised against the proposed demolition of Generalštab. This long list includes the **Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, ICOMOS** and the **International Union of Architects**, as well as Europa Nostra Serbia and other civil society organisations from Serbia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Montenegro, the Czech Republic and beyond. These voices, calling for the preservation and rehabilitation of the site, reflect the widespread professional and public consensus that any decisions regarding the future of protected buildings or ensembles should not be guided by short-term political and/or commercial interests but by the respect of the rule of law and by due consultation with **experts** and citizens.

The European Voice of
Civil Society committed
to Cultural Heritage

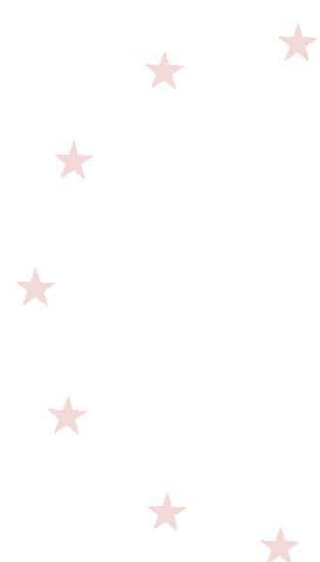
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Moreover, recent alarming reports indicate that the directors of Serbia's key heritage bodies, namely the Institute for monuments protection in Serbia as well as the Institute for monuments protection in Belgrade, decided to resign after refusing to succumb to political pressure to remove the building's legal protections. **This confirms that the campaign for the protection of the Generalštab building is not just a matter of heritage preservation - it is also a matter of upholding the rule of law.** If political interference is allowed to continue in this manner, without respecting the laws and procedures of protected monuments and sites, as well as institutions in charge of heritage protection, what are the guarantees that other cultural monuments in Serbia will be safe from partial destruction or total demolition?

We remind the Serbian authorities of their **obligations under European conventions** and Serbia's own cultural heritage laws, as well as its **commitment to the European Green Deal and also to the New European Bauhaus and the Davos Principles of High Quality Baukultur.** In a time when **sustainability** and **adaptive reuse** are recognised as pillars of modern urban development, Serbia should strive to preserve, restore and enhance its heritage, rather than allowing it to be sacrificed for inappropriate and unsustainable development.

We urge the government of Serbia to adhere to the rule of law and to **take into account the voices of experts and citizens**, and to seek a solution for the rehabilitation and possible adaptive reuse of the Generalštab, which reflects its cultural, historical, architectural and urbanistic significance. Europa Nostra is ready to provide its expertise to help find a win-win solution that respects Serbia's laws and heritage, aligns with European and international standards and ensures a viable and sustainable future of this site, for the benefit of Serbia, its capital city Belgrade and its citizens.

The Generalštab building is not just part of Belgrade's skyline - it is part of Europe's shared cultural legacy. Its rehabilitation and preservation are essential not only for Serbia but for the whole of Europe. **We strongly support the view already expressed by so many relevant and respected organisations active on local, national or international levels, and stand firmly against any plans for demolition of this exceptional protected modernist building.** At the same time, we call for its restoration, rehabilitation and possible adaptive reuse according to established heritage protection procedures and values of high-quality and sustainability.

Europa Nostra, together with its country representation Europa Nostra Serbia, will continue to monitor the situation closely and remains committed to supporting the protection of this invaluable site of European significance. This issue will also be a matter of discussion at the forthcoming [European Cultural Heritage Summit](#), which Europa Nostra will hold in Bucharest from 6 to 8 October 2024 under the High Patronage of the President of the Republic of Romania, H.E. Klaus Iohannis.