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**Report on
Monitoring Mission to**

**THE CURONIAN SPIT
(Lithuania/Russian Federation)**

16–18 August 2001

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1 Background to the Mission

The Curonian Spit was inscribed on the World Heritage List at the 24th Session of the World Heritage Committee in Cairns (Australia) in December 2000. The inscribed property comprises the entire length of the Spit, covering both the Lithuanian and the Russian portions.

At the 25th Session of the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee, held in Paris in June 2001, the Permanent Delegate of Lithuania drew the attention of the meeting to proposed oil extraction by a Russian enterprise in the Baltic Sea from a platform at a point 22km from the coast of the Spit. Subsequently, in July 2001, ICOMOS was requested to send an expert mission and report on the situation. An expert from the UNESCO Moscow Office would also be visiting the Spit.

The mission took place on 16–18 August 2001 when both the ICOMOS and the UNESCO expert were present on the Spit for a conference in Juodkrante (Lithuania) to celebrate the inscription. By prior mutual agreement the ICOMOS expert visited only the Lithuanian portion of the Spit and had meetings with Lithuanian officials; the UNESCO expert had discussions in Kaliningrad with Russian officials. The two experts met in Juodkrante to discuss the situation.

2 Oil exploitation off the Curonian Spit

The D-6 Krakovskaya oil deposit, which was discovered in 1983, is located at a depth of 27–30m in the Baltic Sea shelf, 22km from the coast of the Curonian Spit coast. Its resources are estimated to be 24 million tonnes of oil.

In 1985 the Kaliningradmorneftegaz organization began preparatory work for the construction of the platform. However, as a result of public protest this work was terminated shortly afterwards. The Commission established by the State Committee on Science and Technology of the USSR established that the environmental aspects of the project were insufficiently safe and provided inadequate protection for the Baltic Sea, the Curonian Spit, and other parts of the coastline against the impact of accidental oil spills. In the opinion of the Commission the existing technology did not ensure that exploitation of the oilfield could be carried out without risk of accidents. Furthermore, technical measurements of the localization and dispersal of oil spills were unavailable under the prevailing complicated hydrometeorological conditions.

In 1994 the KANT consortium was set up to exploit the D-6 deposit again. However, the work was brought to a halt as a result of the negotiations to determine the Lithuanian-Russian border. In accordance with the agreement on the Limitation of the Exceptional Economic Zone and Continental Shelf in the Baltic Sea, which was signed on 24 October 1997, the D-6 oil deposit remained in Russian territorial waters.

In 1995 the Lukoil company acquired Kaliningradmorneftegaz and announced that it would exploit D-6 without participation by foreign companies. The announcement that work on this would begin, after ten years' delay, was made by a Lukoil representative on 15 August 2000.

On 24 October 2000 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania requested the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Vilnius to notify Lithuania about the work being carried out in the Baltic Sea relating to the exploitation of the D-6 oil deposit, which Russia was obliged to do under the provisions of the HELCOM Convention. Russian Embassy representatives stated that this note had been transmitted to the Russian Foreign Ministry immediately. However, no reply was received.

At the second session of the Joint Lithuanian-Russian Commission on Fishery Issues, held in Kaliningrad on 9–13 April 2001, the Lithuanian delegation expressed great concern about possible pollution of the sea from the D-6 oil deposit, and proposed that there should be joint monitoring of Lithuanian and Russian living sea resources in the vicinity of the D-6 well. The Russian delegation stated that such monitoring was being carried out by Russian scientific institutions; information would be exchanged in accordance with the provisions of the 1991 Convention on Economic Impact Assessment on the Border. Participation by Lithuanian scientists in this work would be coordinated with corresponding Russian institutions.

The Russian Ambassador was called to the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 14 June 2001 and asked to explain why there had been no answer to the note of October 2000. The Ambassador stated that oil was not being extracted from the D-6 deposit at the moment, but did not provide any information about preparatory works being carried out there.

It is understood that the second support block of the platform, living modules for drilling operatives, and the drilling equipment are to be installed in the immediate future, with all platform construction completed by 2002. During the visit by boat by the mission on 16 August it was observed that there was activity at the platform, with a heavy crane apparently being used for the transfer of equipment. From 2002 until 2003 the level of oil extraction will be low, but production will rise to 70,000 tonnes of high-quality oil during 2003.

Lithuanian geologists estimate that one-third of the resources of the D-6 deposit, up to 8.4 million tonnes, will be extracted and that exploitation of the deposit is planned to last 10–15 years.

Most of this information was provided by the Lithuanian authorities in advance of the mission. Russia had been requested by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre via the Russian Permanent Delegation for its comments on the project but nothing had been received up to the time that this report was prepared.

3 Programme of the mission

Wednesday 15 August	Fly London–Vilnius Transfer to by to Juodkrante
Thursday 16 August	Travel by Lithuania Coastguard boat to view platform Discussions at headquarters of Kuršių Nerija National Park
Friday 17 August local	Participate in conference at Juodkrante, attended by national and representatives from Lithuania and Russia, to celebrate inscription on the World Heritage List Preliminary discussions and exchange of information with Uli Gräbener (UNESCO Moscow Office)
Saturday 18 August	Tour of Kuršių Nerija National Park Final discussions with Lithuanian officials and Uli Gräbener Return to Vilnius by car

4 Observations

4.1 Visual impact

The drilling platform lies 22km from the coast of the Curonian Spit and 6km from the sea border between Lithuania and Russia. When viewed on 20 August, which was a very clear day, it was visible only as the merest speck on the horizon from the highest point on the Spit. In no sense therefore can the platform be considered to have any visual impact on the World Heritage site.

4.2 Potential impact of oil spill

The threat posed to the values for which the Curonian Spit was inscribed on the World Heritage List is overwhelmingly that represented by an oil spill. This might be caused by several events:

- An accident to the rig on the platform;
- An accident to a tanker being charged with oil;
- A collision with the platform by a vessel during bad weather conditions;
- Damage to the platform as a result of exceptional weather conditions (e.g. the hurricane of December 1999).

The prevailing wind and sea currents would drive an oil spill in a north-easterly direction, depositing the oil on the Baltic shores of the Lithuanian part of the Spit. A severe spill might see pollution extending further along the Lithuanian coast, and even as far as Latvia. This is the most vulnerable part of the Curonian Spit, as demonstrated by the impact of the 1999 hurricane, which caused damage to the structure of the avant-dune that is only beginning now to consolidate again properly, thanks to the efforts of the personnel of the two National Parks (Lithuanian and Russian).

It has been shown by tanker spills in recent years, most recently in Brittany, that the only effective way of ridding sandy beaches of oil pollution is to remove the polluted sand physically, using heavy earth-moving equipment. Large-scale removal of deep layers of sand along the Curonian Spit would place the stability of the avant-dune, upon which the structure of the entire formation depends, seriously at risk.

The wildlife of the Spit and in the waters along its coast is exceptional. Pollution from an oil spill would unquestionably have a grave impact on, in particular, the fish stocks and seabird populations.

Tourism makes a major contribution to the economic stability of both National Parks, and the Baltic coasts are much favoured by visitors. Oil pollution before or during a holiday period could have serious consequences on local economies, especially that of towns such as Nida and Juodkrante.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

i It is essential that a major project of this type should be the subject of an environmental impact assessment (EIA). In view of the location of the project and the delicate political issues involved, two alternatives might be considered: either the assessment should be carried out by a joint Russian-Lithuanian team of experts, or the assessment should be carried out by an independent international consultancy.

ii The Russian company, Lukoil, should be requested to allow Lithuanian experts access to technical data relating to safety provisions on the installation.

iii The two countries should collaborate in the preparation of a risk-preparedness programme, providing detailed proposals for joint preventive and remedial action in the event of an oil spill.

iv It is important that action on the above points should be taken without delay, since work on preparing the platform for oil extraction is currently in progress.

Professor **Henry Cleere**
ICOMOS World Heritage Coordinator

Paris
31 August 2001

Appendix: Principal individuals met during mission

- *Lithuania*

Lithuanian Permanent Delegation	Ugnė Karvelis (Permanent Delegate)
Ministry of Culture	Roma Dovydėniene (Minister of Culture)
	Algimintas Degutis (Deputy Director, Department of Heritage Protection)
Ministry of Environment	Audrone Žičkutė (Assistant to the Minister of Environment)
Fund for Natural Heritage	Gediminas Raščius (Director)
Kuršių Nerija National Park	Vladas Portapas (Director)
	Albertas Kvietkus (Deputy Director)
Geological Survey of Lithuania	Juozas Mockevičius (Director)
Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO	Danguolė Reikatė (Programme Coordinator)

- *Russia*

Kurshkaya Kosa National Park	Gennady N. Teplyakov (Director)
Greenpeace Russia	Alexei Butorin
Moscow State Forest University	Professor Ekaterina G. Mozolevskaya

- *UNESCO Moscow Office*

Wolfgang Reuther	Director
Uli Gräbener	Specialist for Science and Ecology