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IUCN and ICOMOS Evaluation of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid region (extension of “Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid region”) – Nominated for inclusion on the World Heritage List

Progress report on the evaluation and request for supplementary information

Dear Ambassador,

- Further to the above nomination to the World Heritage List, we are writing with information on progress with the IUCN and ICOMOS evaluation. As noted in previous correspondence, the Advisory Bodies seek to develop and maintain a dialogue with States Parties during the evaluation process of all nominations. As per the Operational Guidelines (paragraph 149 and Annex 6 - *Evaluation procedures of the Advisory Bodies for nomination*), this letter also provides the short interim report outlining the status and any issues relevant to evaluations, which is requested to be sent by IUCN before 31 January 2019.

The joint IUCN and ICOMOS World Heritage technical evaluation mission to the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid region (extension of “Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid region”) was undertaken by Mr Brent Mitchell for IUCN and Mrs Cynthia Dunning for ICOMOS, from 23 to 28 September 2018. The evaluators greatly appreciated the excellent support and co-operation provided by your colleagues in the preparation and implementation of the mission, and the kind welcome of the State Party throughout the mission. Please convey our sincere thanks to all of the officials, scientists and contributors that assisted the mission.

From 19 to 28 November 2018, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2019. The IUCN World Heritage Panel was held from 3 to 7 December 2018 and evaluated the natural and mixed properties. Both Advisory Bodies processes will conclude in March/April 2019, following which the evaluation reports will be issued to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre.

The nomination dossier, additional information, together with missions and desk review reports as well as other references regarding the nominated property were carefully examined by the ICOMOS and IUCN's Panel members to formulate their recommendations and considerations.

ICOMOS thanks you for the availability of your Delegation to the meeting held on Friday 23 November 2018 with some representatives of the ICOMOS Panel. During the final part of the ICOMOS Panel meeting that followed, the ICOMOS Panel has identified areas where it considers that further information is needed.

While the ICOMOS Panel considered that the proposed extension of “Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid region” might have the potential to be approved in relation to cultural criteria, this has not yet been demonstrated.

The IUCN Panel greatly appreciated the efforts that have been made in relation to this nomination, noting in particular the connection to the work undertaken via the Upstream Process, and will be discussing the nomination again at the second meeting of the IUCN World Heritage Panel, to be held in March 2019. At this stage, the Panel noted a number of points where additional information is required. We note in particular that both IUCN and ICOMOS Panels shared strong concerns regarding the nature conservation status of Lake Ohrid, as also noted in recent World Heritage Committee decisions, in particular the guarantees of fully effective and operational transboundary cooperation, and also cooperation between environmental, nature conservation and culture heritage institutions at national and local levels required to meet the standards expected by the World Heritage Convention.

Therefore, ICOMOS and IUCN would be grateful if the State Party could consider the following points, and provide a written response to them.

Sewage treatment and water quality

Please confirm the status and plans to undertake further sewage treatment actions and measures to improve water quality related to the Lake and to continue to improve the comprehensive wastewater treatment system for all settlements in the Lake Ohrid basin, and the goals and timelines to achieved improved water quality in the Lake.

Collaboration

As the extension is for a mixed site, it would be helpful to understand how collaboration will be fostered between cultural and natural heritage agencies and departments in Albania. Also, as the enlarged property would be a transnational property, we would also appreciate information on how formal collaboration with the FYR Macedonia will be organized to meet the requirements of the Operational Guidelines, in relation to over-seeing the management of the whole transnational property. The IUCN and ICOMOS Panels noted that despite the fact that transboundary mechanisms are in place there is no evidence that these have been implemented to a satisfactory level.

As part of this information, please confirm the status and plans to strengthen and make fully operational the measures in place to assure transboundary cooperation, including in relation to monitoring the lake's biodiversity and water quality, exchanging relevant scientific data, and establishing common management actions such as jointly agreed fishing quotas. We would also appreciate are the minutes of the most recent meeting of the Lake Ohrid Watershed Committee, the outcomes achieved since its last meeting, and the date and agenda for its next meeting.

Staffing and resources

Please provide additional information to quantify (in terms of additional budget and additional staffing and other resources) the new technical and financial capacity that will be provided, in order to ensure the management of Lake Ohrid as a transboundary World Heritage site, and also the timeline by which new resources are committed to be available.

Lin Church

The details provided for the Lin Church in the Nomination dossier are quite slight. In order to understand more fully how this small church might relate to the large ensemble of monastic basilicas and churches associated with Lake Ohrid in FYR Macedonia, the ICOMOS Panel considers that it would be helpful if further evidence could be provided in terms of its plan, style of mosaics, and existing historical documentation that could lend credibility to the idea that the Lake Ohrid basin was in some way a cultural unit during the era that the church was flourishing.

The ICOMOS Panel understands that excavations were undertaken at the church in the 1960s but that these remain unpublished. Nevertheless, the ICOMOS Panel is aware of a number of published reports and individual studies on the significance of its architecture and mosaic decoration.

Therefore, the ICOMOS Panel would like to request a synthesis of what is known from these publications, and others that may be relevant, in order to help us gain a better understanding of the importance of the church, how its plan typology and mosaic decorations might be seen to relate to contemporary structures in Ohrid, how it adds to knowledge of Early Christian architecture in the Ohrid region, and how its typology relates to other parts of the Balkans. In particular it would also be helpful if the still unanswered issues raised by this monument could be presented.

Pile Dwellings

Similarly, the ICOMOS Panel considers that it would be helpful if a synthesis could be provided on what is known of the nominated pile dwellings sites in term of surveys, research and any excavations that have been undertaken. It would also be helpful if an overview could be provided as to how these sites relate to those pile dwelling sites that have been identified and investigated in the existing property in FYR Macedonia, as these are not acknowledged in the nomination dossier.

Boundaries

The Driloni springs are included in the nominated area, while the nearby Tushemisht springs are excluded. The ICOMOS and IUCN Panels would be pleased if the State Party could provide a justification for the why these two areas – which both feed the lake and both have cultural significance – have been treated differently.

Buffer Zone

The proposed buffer zone is large and appears to have been delineated in order to protect water sources. In terms of cultural aspects, the ICOMOS Panel would be pleased if details could be provided on the purpose of the buffer zone in relation to how it would support the cultural aspects of an enlarged property, and on how the buffer zone will be protected and managed to deliver such cultural support. In particular, a clearer understanding is needed of how the setting of the Lin peninsula will be protected and managed, and overall how the cultural landscape of the buffer zone will be protected and managed as a cultural setting for the lake.

Proposed developments

Details have been provided on the proposed leisure areas alongside parts of the new coast road. The ICOMOS and IUCN Panels have considered these and also details of a proposed development project for Driloni and Tushemisht. We are also aware of developments on the outskirts of Pogradec. Please could details be provided as to how these projects relate to the protection in place for the property and the buffer zone?

We would also like to request up to date details of the railway project between Kiçevohe and the Lin peninsula, one of the two yet to be completed sections of the EU Pan-European Corridor VIII connecting the Black Sea with the Adriatic, through Bulgaria, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania. It is understood that the initial proposals for this section of the proposed line were for it to pass alongside the lake within Albania and then connect into the existing railway structures west of the Lin peninsula.

In 2017 a Joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS/IUCN Reactive Monitoring Mission visited the inscribed property in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and recommended that the authorities submit to the World Heritage Centre, for review by the Advisory Bodies, a comprehensive comparative study of alternative routes including those that do not pass in close vicinity to the lakeshore in Albania. It would be helpful to understand what work has been undertaken on alternative routes, and if details could be provided of what is currently proposed.

We would appreciate your response to the above points as soon as possible, in order to facilitate the evaluation process, but **no later than the 28 February 2019**, as per paragraph 148 of the Operational Guidelines. Please note that any information submitted after this date will not be considered by IUCN in its evaluation for the World Heritage Committee. It should be noted, however, that while IUCN will carefully consider any supplementary information submitted, it cannot properly evaluate a completely revised nomination or large amounts of new information submitted at the last minute. So we request to keep your response concise and respond only to the above requests.

Supplementary information should be submitted officially in three copies to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in order for it to be registered as part of the nomination. An electronic copy of any supplementary information to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre (a.balsamo@unesco.org), IUCN Headquarters (christelle.perruchoud@iucn.org) and ICOMOS Headquarters (apsara.sanchez@icomos.org) would also be helpful.

Taking into account your response, IUCN and ICOMOS will formulate their final recommendation to the World Heritage Committee which will meet from 30 June to 10 July 2019 in Azerbaijan.

In the interest of ensuring dialogue with the States Parties, ICOMOS and IUCN would be ready for a Skype call to clarify any of the above points, or other matters related to the nomination dossier, if that might be considered to be helpful.

ICOMOS and IUCN are available to meet you in Paris if this would be helpful. You or your representatives are also most welcome to visit IUCN's headquarters in Switzerland to meet in person if you wish, on this nomination, or on any other matter of interest.

Please do not hesitate to contact Ms Christelle Perruchoud, World Heritage Evaluations and Operations Officer (Tel: +41 22 999 0358; Fax: +41 22 999 0002; email: christelle.perruchoud@iucn.org) or Mrs Gwenaëlle Bourdin, Director of the ICOMOS Evaluation Unit (Tel: +33 (0)1 41 94 17 59, email: gwenaelle.bourdin@icomos.org) if you have any questions regarding this request, or if you would wish to arrange a meeting or phone call to discuss this request.

Please also note that from 1 January 2019 there will be a change in World Heritage arrangements in IUCN. Peter Shadie will be taking over the role of Director, the IUCN World Heritage Programme for 2019-20, and Tim Badman will be moving to manage a new assignment in IUCN. Peter Shadie will be available for any discussions required on this letter, or any other matters regarding IUCN's evaluation of the nomination.

Please allow us to reiterate our thanks for your support of the World Heritage Convention and for the conduct of ICOMOS/IUCN joint mission. We look forward to your kind cooperation in furnishing responses to the abovementioned points.

Yours sincerely,



Tim Badman
Director
IUCN World Heritage Programme



Gwenaëlle Bourdin
Director
ICOMOS Evaluation Unit

cc. Commission nationale albanaise pour l' UNESCO, Mr Sokol Gjoka, Secretary-General
UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Mrs Isabelle Anatole-Gabriel and Mr Alessandro Balsamo
IUCN Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, Mr. Boris Erg, Regional Director
Ministry of Culture
Institute of Cultural Monuments