

Our Ref. GB/EG/1696/IR

Charenton-le-Pont, 21 December 2022

H. E. Mr Elman Abdullayev
Ambassador, Permanent Delegate
Permanent Delegation of Azerbaijan to
UNESCO
Maison de l'UNESCO
1, rue Miollis
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World Heritage List 2023

The Cultural Landscape of Khinalig People and “Köç Yolu” Transhumance Route (Azerbaijan) – Interim report and additional information request

Dear Ambassador,

As prescribed by the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* and its Annex 6, the Advisory Bodies have to submit a short interim report for each nomination by 31 January 2023. We are therefore pleased to provide you with the relevant information outlining issues related to the evaluation procedure.

The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission to the “The Cultural Landscape of Khinalig People and “Köç Yolu” Transhumance Route” was carried out by Mr. Hossam Mahdy (Egypt) in August 2022. The mission expert highly appreciated the availabilities and support provided by the experts in your country for the organisation and implementation of the mission.

On 3 October 2022, a letter was sent by ICOMOS to request further information regarding the description of the property, the comparative analysis, the factors affecting the property, and the protection and management of the property. Please convey our thanks to all the officials and experts for the additional information you provided on 7 November 2022 and for their continued cooperation in this process.

At the end of November 2022, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2023. The additional information provided by the State Party, together with the mission and desk review reports were carefully examined by the Panel members. This process will conclude in March 2023.

We thank you for the availability of your Delegation for attending the meeting held on 26 November 2022 with some representatives of the ICOMOS Panel. The exchanges during this meeting were of great help for the third part of the ICOMOS Panel meeting. During the last part of its meeting, the Panel has identified areas where it considers that further information is needed.

Therefore, we would be pleased if the State Party could consider the following points:

Comparative Analysis

The nomination dossier as well as the additional information provided by the State Party present a valuable, wide-ranging list of comparable properties. The characteristics that identify vertical descending transhumance in the Caucasus are specified as compared with the transhumance practices in central Asia. The ICOMOS Panel considers that the nomination would benefit from further analysis of these regional characteristics as well as a more in-depth examination of qualities that give significance to the nominated property in comparison to other equivalent surviving vertical transhumance systems in the Caucasus. Further argumentation would be helpful to demonstrate that the Khinalig transhumance culture and living landscape is an outstanding representative of transhumance in the region.

Documentation

The ICOMOS Panel notes the lack of documentation and inventory of the architectural, archaeological as well as infrastructure and landscape elements of the nominated property, that are suggested to contribute to the proposed outstanding universal value.

More detailed topographic and cadastral maps of temporary transhumance infrastructure (*yataqs* with *qazma* houses, *arxacs* and Summer camping areas, watering and resting points, transit pastures - *yazlaq*, *guzleks*, and other features) as well as of the other cultural heritage elements (cemeteries, bridges, caravanserais, shrines, tombs, sacred areas, etc.) would be very helpful to better understand their location, the spatial relationship between them as well as the relation of each towards the surrounding landscape and their links to the Khinalig transhumance culture.

ICOMOS would be pleased to receive more detailed information as well on the chronology, the values, the physical state and the conservation needs of each of these contributing elements. If this information is partially available, ICOMOS would be pleased if the State Party could explain how it will address this issue.

Boundaries

The ICOMOS Panel observes that the lack of precise cartographic information weakens the rationale for the proposed delineation of boundaries. The disputes over the use of various segments along the migration route further amplify the need for a more precise depiction of boundaries based on cadastral and topographic maps. ICOMOS would appreciate if the State Party could provide cartographic materials that indicate the areas where sedentary farmers encroach on the transhumance route, as well as the boundaries of the property and its buffer zone, in order to provide a better understanding of the impact of land-use conflicts on the transhumance culture of the Khinalig people.

Management and legal protection

ICOMOS would be pleased to receive a detailed timeframe for the adoption and implementation of the draft Presidential decree that will ensure the designation of the whole nominated property as a reserve protected as national heritage resource, and for the related interdisciplinary action plan. The ICOMOS Panel considers that it is crucial to put in place a comprehensive set of measures to address trends affecting the nominated property, such as the sedentarisation and migration trends among the Khinalig community presented in the additional information.

The ICOMOS Panel acknowledges the intentions and efforts of the State Party to improve cross-sectoral coordination and establish a single management authority for the entire property. However, it would be helpful to further specify in which way these measures will improve the legal protection of the territory and its different constituting elements. Could the State Party please provide information showing the existing sectoral regulations for the territory? Such material would be helpful to understand which parts of the nominated property are currently covered with legal protection instruments and plans.

Furthermore, ICOMOS would appreciate receiving more detailed information on the set of regulations currently under development for the buffer zone, as well as specifications concerning any other protection regulations planned to be introduced on the territory of the nominated property and its buffer zone.

Taking note of the developments around the old Khinalig village and the large number of villages in the proposed buffer zone, ICOMOS considers it necessary to further specify the list of settlements within the proposed boundaries of the property and its buffer zone, and clarify whether there are land-use regulations or masterplans in place for these settlements.

ICOMOS appreciates the additional information provided by the State Party on the role and contribution of the other settlements located within the nominated areas and the buffer zones. In the same way, ICOMOS would be pleased to receive additional information on the role and contribution of the Bostankesh settlement in order to complete the information already received.

ICOMOS would appreciate receiving further clarifications on the timeframe for implementation of the management plan as well as the establishment of the proposed management authority. It would also be helpful to further specify the role of the Council of Elders within the proposed management system.

Conservation

The ICOMOS Panel notes that the state of conservation of major elements of the property is quite low and fragile, and that widespread use of incompatible modern materials as well as a new development around the Khinalig village are happening. The plans presented by the State Party to address the conservation issues are rather generic. At the same time, the mass rehabilitation program of the Khinalig village is already underway.

Considering the complexity of the situation, ICOMOS would find it helpful to receive further clarification on the steps and measures designed to improve the state of conservation of the nominated property, including the timeframe for the elaboration of a comprehensive conservation masterplan for the entire property that would secure long-term conservation of the territory with all the key landscape, architectural and archaeological elements and provide sustainable long-term solutions for appropriate use of modern materials where possible, while maintaining the traditional building practices. At the same time, further clarification would be necessary to specify the strategy for ongoing rehabilitation works before the amendment of the respective legal framework occurs, as proposed by the end of 2023.

We look forward to your responses to these points, which will be of great help in our evaluation procedure.

We would be grateful if you could provide **ICOMOS** and the **World Heritage Centre** with the above information **by 28 February 2023 at the latest**, the deadline set out in paragraph 148 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* for additional information on nominations to be received. Please note that any information submitted after this date will not be considered by ICOMOS in its evaluation for the World Heritage Committee. It should be noted, however, that while ICOMOS will carefully consider any additional information submitted, it cannot properly evaluate a completely revised nomination or large amounts of new information submitted at the last minute. So, we would be grateful if the State Party could keep its response concise and respond only to the above requests.

We thank you for your support of the World Heritage Convention and the evaluation procedure.

Yours faithfully,



Gwenaëlle Bourdin
Director
ICOMOS Evaluation Unit

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 National Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan for UNESCO
 UNESCO World Heritage Centre