

URBANISMWATCH

Prizren Urban Planning
under constant watch

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PRESS RELEASE

Municipality Lays Foundation of Library without Obtaining MCYS Permission

During its urban planning monitoring activities in Prizren for this month, "ECMaNdryshe" investigated the case of symbolic beginning of works for the construction of the new City Library within the complex of the old school "Ryzhdije".

Based on the information taken from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports and Urban Planning Directorate of Prizren Municipality it comes out that MCYS still has not given the final permission for the library construction project, while Department of Urban and Spatial Planning (DUSP) has yet not given the construction permit for the project in question.

At the beginning of December, Prizren municipality Mayor, Ramadan Muja with his colleagues, laid the cornerstone for the construction of the City Library, which, according to municipal authorities, will be public and university library. According to Mayor's statements, project implementation cost will reach the tune of EUR 500,000, and for 2014 the amount of EUR 140,000 was allocated for this purpose.

Prior to laying the cornerstone, in one of the meetings between the Mayor and municipal Directors, DUSP Director, Nijazi Kryeziu, confirmed that this initiative can continue.

However, after the request for access to public documents, MCYS – Department of Cultural Heritage confirmed that "MCYS has not given the permission for the project in question".

In this memo of 20 November 2014, MCYS – DCH sent the most recent recommendations of the Commission for Review and Assessment of Requests – Restoration and Conservation Projects of Cultural Heritage, repeating the recommendation for further supplementation of the project as the instructions provided by the QRTK in Prizren. The same recommendations were also sent to DCYS of Prizren Municipality in the memo dated 14 February 2013.

Commission approved some amendments/supplements to the project; however it also required the following:

- Extension of the terrace eave and placement of support beam;
- Construction of eave from the wood construction without concrete console;
- All façade decoration elements be removed and replaced with decoration elements of Prizren architecture;
- To plan the placement of chimneys, traditional roof tiles and copper water spouts.

According to MCYS, recommendations were sent to QRTK for their further action and the municipal officials were also notified about this. In one of the Commission's meetings, Deputy Mayor was informed on the project review procedure and recommendations provided.

"There was a commitment that the project will be drafted in compliance to the recommendations and criteria, however the project as such has not been submitted yet", the MCYS memo points out.

On the other hand, the DUSP of Prizren Municipality informed the monitoring staff that the entire file was sent to QTRK in 2014 for the permission purposes because the project location is within the protected zone of Prizren, and that "QTRK did not return the completed file so that the further procedure for the issuance of permit for the restoration of Prizren City Library could continue".

After the cornerstone was laid, the images of idea project for the library appeared in social media. Response by the community of professionals was immediate, and concerns were raised during the debate on the architecture of the facility, considering that in its current shape and form it cannot represent the traditional values of the city, specifically the values of the former Ruzhdije complex. They share the opinion that a more extensive debate is required in the project review so that genuine architectural values could be included for the building to be a representative one and meet the conditions for a functional library.

In line with the answers obtained by the MCYS and DUSP officials, it is clear that in order to implement this project, relevant legal procedures should be applied. The response by the community of professionals implies that the idea project needs to be reviewed so that Prizren could have a prominent facility for the city library. The Ruzhdije building had to be included in the idea project by all means and be addressed jointly with the new structure. It is worth of mentioning that Ruzhdije building is a protected cultural heritage site included in the Temporary Protection List of MCYS.

Based on these findings, ECMaNdryshe comes to conclusion that beginning of projects/works without meeting the required legal procedures and without obtaining the relevant construction permits is becoming a common thing for the municipal authorities, the same as the failure to implement genuine debates on the capital investments of specific nature.

Therefore, the recommendation for the municipal leadership would be to carry out discussions with architects and other professionals on the idea project for the City Library.

After the receipt of comments, suggestions and remarks by the community of professionals, Municipality needs to accurately follow the legal procedures in obtaining the approval by the relevant MCYS Commission, and only after the issuance of construction permit by the DUSP it can start with the construction works in this project.

Prizren Municipality should involve itself more seriously in the protection of cultural heritage values in this protected zone.

In July 2013 "ECMaNdryshe" started with the implementation of the project "Urban Planning of Prizren under Constant Watch", that is financially supported by the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society (KFOS). The project will continue with the monitoring and publication of findings in the field of urban and spatial planning, as well as with addressing the institutional responsibility.

Kindly yours,

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