

War damage to the cultural heritage in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina

Fourth Information Report

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presented by the Committee on Culture and Education

(EXCERPT)

3. REACTIONS TO THE DESTRUCTION OF THE OLD BRIDGE OF MOSTAR ON 9 NOVEMBER 1993

A. Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Message to President Franjo Tudjman from Mrs Leni Fischer, MdB, Chairperson of the Committee on Culture and Education (10 November 1993).

We condemn in the strongest terms the destruction by tank fire of the Old Bridge in Mostar. The means used are totally disproportionate to any possible military use of the bridge.

The bridge had survived as a symbol of the bonds that still exist between Moslems and Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina. With its destruction, our responsibilities for rebuilding such bonds are redoubled.

You have a direct share in this responsibility and we call on you in the first place to withdraw immediately any fighting units and military material that we have been informed you have on the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Reply from Prof Dr Biserka Nagy, Advisor to President Tudjman (25 November 1993)

Madame,

In reply to your message of November 10th, 1993, I have the honour to address you on behalf of the President of the Republic of Croatia.

The President of Croatia, Dr Franjo Tuđman was indeed very sorry to hear of the destruction of the old Bridge in Mostar, one of the most beautiful, cultural monument and the symbol of link between the eastern and the western cultures.

He sincerely regrets the destruction, as he condemns without reservation any mass atrocity in Bosnia and Herzegovina that may be allegedly attributed to Croatian side.

However, President Tuđman clearly disassociates the Republic of Croatia and her Armed Forces from those activities.

We do hope that the investigation of the circumstances will provide reliable evidence to convict those who committed such crimes.

As it has been witnessed before, President Tuđman dedicated himself with all his heart to stop the fighting destruction and loss of human life, and he thanks those helping to fulfil this difficult task.

B. UNESCO

Paris 11 November: The Director-General of Unesco, Federico Mayor, made the following declaration on learning of the destruction of the Stari Most Bridge at Mostar, in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

"After the continuing and shocking loss of life, it is also the cultural heritage which is being destroyed. Another important monument belonging to Bosnia and Herzegovina has disappeared.

"As Director-General of Unesco, I cannot remain silent at the wilful destruction, on 9 November 1993, of the Stari Most Bridge at Mostar. A graceful sixteenth-century example of Ottoman architecture, built by Suleiman the Magnificent, the Bridge at Mostar, spanning the Neretva river, was both a symbol and a reality. By destroying it, the perpetrators of this disgraceful act are trying to eradicate the history of a country and its people. They are thereby also destroying the bridges of mutual understanding built by people of different origins and religious beliefs who had learnt to live together in harmony.

"It is an attack against the values cherished by the international community and dear to the lovers of freedom. The destruction of the Stari Most Bridge has robbed all the communities of Bosnia and Herzegovina of a symbol of hope, ruptured their links with a time of peace and struck at the very roots of their cultural heritage.

"Unesco has a mandate for the protection of cultural heritage. I deplore this loss and once again solemnly appeal to end this conflict and thus spare our cultural heritage and, most important of all, human lives."

C. Europa Nostra

Letter from Daniel Cardon de Lichtbuer, Executive President of Europa Nostra to Dr Franjo Tudjman, President of the Republic of Croatia

(8 December 1993)

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1. Europa Nostra/IBI, a pan-European heritage-protection association with over 200 member organisations in 29 European countries, associates itself with all those who have vigorously condemned the deliberate destruction of the Old Bridge at Mostar by armoured Croatian forces on 9 November 1993. We regard that act, for which there was no military justification, as a serious and manifest violation of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and accordingly request that you take whatever steps are necessary to issue a public denunciation of those responsible.

2. We would take this opportunity of reminding you that Europa Nostra/IBI has twice (in December 1991 and May 1992) adopted resolutions condemning all destruction, by whatever side, of the outstanding architectural and natural heritage in regions of the former Yugoslavia.

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Letter from Baron Janko Vranyczany-Dobrinovic, Ambassador of Croatia, Brussels to Jonkheer Daniel Cardon de Lichtbuer, Executive President, Europa Nostra

(9 December 1993)

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I acknowledge receipt of a copy of Europa Nostra's letter to the President of the Republic of Croatia, Mr Franjo Tudjman, concerning the destruction of the Old Bridge at Mostar.

Since I myself am involved, in my spare time, in the conservation of castles and monuments in Croatia (all of which have suffered, many of them irreparably, whether from the treatment they received under the Communist regime or the destructive assaults on Croatia by the former Yugoslav army and the Serb militia in 1990-92) and having personally instigated the setting-up of a small Croatia Nostra group in 1991, I need scarcely say that I personally am extremely saddened by the destruction, on this occasion apparently by Croatian units in Bosnia-Herzegovina, of an internationally renowned monument.

The vast majority of the Croatian people, who have been deeply shocked by the barbaric destruction of the 18th century town of Vukovar and much of Dubrovnik, the destruction of hundreds of churches and monasteries, and the damage to Sibenik Cathedral one of the finest Renaissance monuments in Dalmatia, would not approve of any destruction of the cultural heritage, whether in Croatia or elsewhere.

Allow me to quote the latest statement by President Tudjman, made at a press conference: "The destruction of the Old Bridge in Mostar happened under war-time conditions. From the historic standpoint, from the standpoint of the protection of these historic structures for communications, I consider that detrimental. As far as I am concerned, I can openly say that I sent a demand to the people in the leadership of Herceg-Bosna to examine why this occurred and that those who did this should be held accountable."

Assuring you that your work has my entire support