



The World Heritage Project

An excerpt of the application for the Tentative List (2000) can be read below.

Application by the Republic of Hungary for the inclusion of the complex of 3 buildings of the Ensemble of Historic Forts in Komárom and Komárno (SK) into the World Heritage List

2000

IDENTIFICATION OF THE CULTURAL MONUMENT

a. Country Republic of Hungary

b. County Komárom-Esztergom County, North-Western Transdanubian (EU)-Region

c. Name of the monument

The Ensemble of Historic Forts in Komárom

d. Location on the map, geographical co-ordinates to the nearest second

Komárom is located in the north-western part of Hungary, on both facing banks of the Danube. Northern 47,7°, eastern 18.1 longitude.

f. The size of the nominated area and the buffer zone (in hectares)

The size of land affected by the nominated buildings: 150 ha

The size of recommended buffer zone: 2.000 ha

SUMMARY

as justification of outstanding universal value

The complex system of historic forts in and around the "twin-towns" of Komárom (Hungary) and Komárno (Slovakia) is situated on the facing banks of the Danube. Forts on both sides are individually, too, authentic historic and cultural values, representing the highest level of military architecture of their building age, without alteration from the 20th century. The forts or their predecessors are built and rebuilt during centuries, but their actual forms show the most complex building crafts and style of the 19th century (1852-1890). They keep alive the talent of the builders – architects, engineers, officers, masons and other craftsmen and workers - and that of "users" – soldiers, refugees, deportees - from several nations and nationalities living in this region of Europe, representing in image, space and substance a unique cross-section of the continuous common history of Central Europe, from the Roman times till the Cold War.

The forts had not been besieged in recent wars of the 20th century, so they are suitable site for peaceful messages and functions: museums, conference centres, places of cultural events and artistic auctions, craftsmen-training, non-profit workshops, art studios, memorial place and other cultural-tourist services. As proved by visitors from all the world, the main attraction is and always will be the forts themselves as historic monuments: unique, intrinsic and authentic values even in their actual derelict state.

The huge empty spaces of casemates, gun-shelters, hospitals, bakeries, stables and other former military facilities are always captivating visitors from the youngest generation to the oldest veterans. Artists are fascinated by the wonderful images of sometimes surprisingly large and wide, sometimes incredibly long and narrow inner spaces, the sculptural surfaces of the external carved stone-made cyclop-walls and complicated vaults built of millions of yellow brick in the astonishing interiors, the game of lights and shadows of thousands of loop-holes and gun-smoke-windows. Collectors of historic objects as fans of historic militaria are excited by the idea of meeting and presenting their valuable collections here. Veterans of several nations, refugees from resistance and deportees of Jewish and Gipsy holocaust hope to have a deserved and befitting memorial place of the sacrificed. Intellectuals hope, that this place could join all these "individualist" groups together and guide them to a morally more positive and complex vision of future, toward the love of our common European Heritage by creating a "new" instrument to heal the deep wounds left by the twentieth century. Politicians hope to create here a place contributing to the dissolving of regional historic-rooted

conflicts. All partners involved in this nomination are deeply believing, that this symbolic-mythic place is worth to be part of the World Heritage.

The nomination is launched by the Hungarian National Committee, with a list drawn up by the Historic Fort Monostor Military Cultural Centre Building Preservation Trust, a non-profit organisation set up this year to save, restore and reuse of the biggest and most intact historic fort, but also with the task to set up a complex Private-Public Partnership management plan and to coordinate the activity between all great historic forts of the region from that time.

We all hope, that starting from the tentative list, together with our Slovakian, Polish, Serbian – and maybe Czech, Croatian and Slovenian – friend from historic forts dating from the end of the 19th century, the final nomination will join together all the historic forts of great value into one chain of euro-regional World Heritage Site(s).

BRIEF HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE(S)

The site – the area of the "twin-towns" of Komárom (H) and Komárno (SK) situated on the facing banks of the Danube - has since ancient times been an important cross-point on the Danube. The Roman fortresses and towns Brigetio and Celamantia of the Pannonian Roman Limes were flourishing and active between the 1st and the 4th centuries AD, (partly excavated ruins are situated nearby, in the buffer zone). Emperor Marcus Aurelius passed nearby or took part in battles, emperor Valentinianus died here on 17th November 375 AD after a victorious battle with Celtic tribes.

Starting from the 10th century, the mediaeval town of Komárom was developed into one of the major cities of the region and its famous Old Fortress – strengthened after the Mongol Invasion in 1424 - became an important defensive element protecting the international fluvial (Danube), east-west (Wien-L.vov) and north-south (Baltic Sea - Adriatic Sea) public, military and commercial crossroads.

During the 15th and 16th centuries, the Old Fortress was serving as one of the most important elements of the European defensive system against the attacks of the Ottoman Empire. For one and half centuries Komárom and its fortress were continuously in war on the border of the Ottoman and Austrian Empires, but it never had been conquered in siege. Forced by the attacks of the United European Army led by Eugene de Savoy, the Ottoman army withdraw its troops from Hungary (1682-99), and Komárom lost its military importance for the next one and half century. But it got again a symbolically significant role during the Revolution and War of Independence in 1848-49, as the only one fortress defended by the revolutionary troops till the end of the war. Suffering several sieges during the centuries, the Komárom fortresses had never been conquered by enemy, so the inscription on its wall - "NEC ARTE, NEC MARTE", "neither by force, nor by tricks" – became the motto of this "Gibraltar of the Danube"

(as poets and writers in the romantic period called it), and since ages the fort(resses) were and are till today important symbols of pride of all Central European nations participating in these historic wars and revolutions.

In 1850, based on a larger political consideration, the Austrian Empire decided to build up the most up-to-date defensive line on the Danube, with the aim to protect Wien from "any kind of enemy" coming from the east. Based on the "Montalambert principles" of Italian planners, 3 great forts had been erected parallelly: Komárom-Komárno (now: Hungary and Slovakia), Przemysl (now: Poland) and Petervarad (now: Serbia), these are actually strating to rebuild cultural and touristic contacts based on their common historical values.

During the second half of the 19th century, on the south bank of the river Danube, in Komárom 3 big, new, co-operating fortresses were erected around the town – partly using the existing pre- and post-napoleonic elements. The biggest is Fort Monostor (or Fort Sandberg, 1850-72), but Fort Csillag (1870-75) and Fort Igmándi (1871-77) are also equally important elements of the defensive system. Together with the renewed Old Fortress and the Palatinus Line (with 16 large bastions and interconnecting walls) in Komárno (Slovakia), on the other side of the Danube, the system of "independent" forts formed a complete circle of defensive building elements, which in case of war was able to shelter over 250.000 people.

Completed around 1890, the whole ensemble lost its military importance, partly for technical reasons (due to the effects of the new ballistic guns), partly due to its new logistical position (situated in the middle of the Austro-Hungarian Empire). The new ensemble of forts has never been attacked in war, so it kept its structure unchanged. Though it was continuously used for different "auxiliary" military purposes: it served as training base for the Hungarian Army (1869-1943), during WW II was serving as



transitional camp for Polish and French refugees (1939-42), after the occupation of Hungary by the German troops (1944) as temporary prison for deportees of the Jewish and Gypsy holocaust (on their way to German camps).

Between 1946-1990 the ensemble became the biggest "secret" ammunition magazine of the Soviet Army (no civil person was allowed to enter and the forts disappeared even from the maps). Strongly live "legends" say the Soviets built a tunnel under the Danube and atomic missiles had been put in the underground shelters, but these are not yet proved by scientific research.

The Soviet troops didn't destroy any built element of the forts, just added new buildings in the buffer zone (outside the walls) and, during the last months of their staying here, removed and sell out all movable parts (windows, floors). Many inscriptions on the walls keep the memory of the tragic life period of young people forced to come from all nations of the former Soviet Union and serving here for years, completely isolated from the local civil life. The motto of the new Building Preservation Trust is taken from one of the soviet soldiers inscription, saying: "HE, WHO WAS NOT HERE, CAN'T IMAGINE, HE, WHO WAS HERE, WILL NEVER FORGET IT."

The forts were "re-discovered" after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. In 1992 they were listed as National Monument, grade I ("M"), and – after being cleaned from rests of weapons and mines - in 1994 public - in damaged state - were partly reopened for the general public.

COMPARISON WITH OTHER SIMILAR PROPERTIES

Compared to similar forts of this age built in Europe and overseas (e.g. Malta, Palmerston Forts, Mexico, Atlantic Coast Defensive Line, Soumenlinna etc), the Komárom Forts present an outstanding values not only by the highest architectural features (gates, windows, stairs in high quality classicist style), "cyclope"-walls in carved stones and complicated intersecting vaults, but also by its former militaria defensive concept. Historians demonstrated, that the ensemble of forts had been really unconquerable at that age (to be proved by a "test siege" historic game in 2001).

The forts of Komárom passed a unique historival phase in recent years. The fortress, used for decades as the largest ammunition magazine of the Warsaw Pact armies, was one of the three important Hungarian historic sites heavily damaged by the improper use and the complete lack of maintenance. It has been polluted by chemicals and weapons. Some alterations were made around the entrance gate and the inner spaces. These damages were estimated to 6 million USD.

After the retreat of the troops, the site became empty. The ensemble was not overtaken by the Hungarian Army, since nowadays it is no more suitable for military purposes. Although guarded by the Trust, disinfected and repaired to an extent, the fort is in the danger of decay. Without any function it cannot be kept and presented to the great public in an acceptable condition. The whole fort, as a mainly underground construction, needs constant surveillance and maintenance, without that, it will become dangerous and its soon collapse is predictable.

The Forts are the biggest and the only relatively intact monuments of its type, characterised by the highest standards of military architecture of the 19th century. The site bears strong historical memories of Central European nation's struggle for freedom and independence. On these reasons, the all partners and responsible authorities accepted the proposal to create here a Historic Military Centre on the whole site, and the Trust was established to co-ordinate the works. As a very first one of this type of Centres in Central Europe, the idea has captivated large interest of all possibly involved parties. The trust has received positive answers from similar institutions, military attachés, artists, mecenas and private investors to take part in this Public Private Partnership project.

Besides large scale open-air and in-door museums, the complex should give place for theatres, fairs and festivals and conferences, education facilities (historic games and crafts), and other joining activities, such as riding school, archers' training or sport activities on the water. The project foresees a complex "product", for cultural and historical tourism, based on the existing astonishing real values of the site. The closeness of not only the Hungarian, but also the Slovakian (Bratislava) and Austrian (Wien) capitals, can provide an international character for the site. The total costs of the project (restoration, infrastructure, and installation) can be estimated to 50 million EURO-s. Most of the needed sources could be financed through a successful development project. Obviously the project can be phased and successively developed to its final complexity (see: management plan).

Ownership:

The Hungarian State

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