

PRESS RELEASE

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12 European heritage sites shortlisted for the 7 Most Endangered Programme 2021

The Hague / Luxembourg, 10 December 2020

Europa Nostra - the European voice of civil society committed to cultural and natural heritage - and its partner organisation, the European Investment Bank Institute, have today announced **the 12 most threatened heritage sites in Europe shortlisted for the 7 Most Endangered programme 2021**:

- [Achensee Steam Cog Railway, Tyrol, AUSTRIA](#)
- [Modern Theatre, Sofia, BULGARIA](#)
- [Cemetery Complex of Mirogoj, Zagreb, CROATIA](#)
- [Church of Saint-Denis, Hauts-de-France, FRANCE](#)
- [Narikala Fortress, Tbilisi, GEORGIA](#)
- [Green Space System, Cologne, GERMANY](#)
- [Five Southern Aegean Islands, GREECE](#)
- [The Giusti Garden, Verona, ITALY](#)
- [The Ca' Zenobio Palace, Venice, ITALY](#)
- [Dečani Monastery, KOSOVO*](#)
- [Central Post Office in Skopje, NORTH MACEDONIA](#)
- [San Juan de Socueva Chapel and Hermitage, Cantabria, SPAIN](#)

(Information about these exceptional European heritage sites¹ and the reasons why they were shortlisted are provided below.)

The selection was made on the basis of the outstanding heritage significance and cultural value of each of the sites as well as on the basis of the serious danger that they are facing. The level of engagement of local communities and the commitment of public and private stakeholders to saving these sites were considered as crucial added values. Another selection criterion was the potential of these sites to act as a catalyst for sustainable socio-economic development for their localities and wider regions.

The 12 endangered heritage sites were shortlisted by an international [Advisory Panel](#), comprising experts in history, archaeology, architecture, conservation, project analysis and finance. Nominations for the 7 Most Endangered Programme 2021 were submitted by member organisations, associate organisations and individual members of Europa Nostra from all over Europe as well as by members of the [European Heritage Alliance](#).

The final list of 7 Most Endangered heritage sites in Europe for 2021 will be unveiled in March.

The Executive President of Europa Nostra, Prof. Dr. **Hermann Parzinger**, stated: *“At a time of a distressing global crisis, we stand in full solidarity with local communities all across Europe who are the tireless stewards of our most vulnerable heritage assets. We stand in solidarity and we also stand in action. You can count on Europa Nostra, and our wide network of members and partners, to raise our voices in defence of these 12 heritage sites at risk of being lost forever. From iconic natural landscapes, to sites of religious significance and modernist architectural gems, these remarkable sites embody our shared history and are an untapped source of development and wellbeing for the regions and countries involved and for Europe as a whole. At a time when it is most needed, let us work together to preserve our cultural heritage and place it where it belongs: at the heart of Europe’s post-pandemic recovery”.*

The Dean of the European Investment Bank Institute, **Francisco de Paula Coelho**, said: *“This shortlist is an important reminder that our cultural heritage is fragile and that it should not be taken for granted. With this shortlist, our joint aim is to support and amplify the efforts of local communities who, throughout Europe, are*

¹ The sites are listed in alphabetical order of the country where they are located.

convinced of the immense and multifaceted value of our cultural heritage. In order to fully capitalise on our shared cultural heritage as a driver of sustainable development, we must ensure its physical safeguarding as the first and most urgent step”.

The 7 Most Endangered Programme is run by **Europa Nostra** in partnership with the **European Investment Bank Institute**. It also has the support of the **Creative Europe programme** of the European Union. Launched in 2013, this programme forms part of a **civil society campaign** to save Europe's endangered heritage. It raises awareness, prepares independent assessments and proposes recommendations for action. While **not providing direct funding**, the listing of an endangered site often serves as a **catalyst and incentive for mobilisation of the necessary public or private support**, including funding.

For the 2021 edition, for the first time since the launch of the programme, the selected 7 Most Endangered heritage sites will be eligible for an **EIB Heritage Grant of up to €10,000 per site**. The EIB Heritage Grant can be allocated to the eligible selected 7 Most Endangered sites to assist in implementing an agreed activity that will contribute to saving the threatened site.

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TO FIND OUT MORE

About each shortlisted site:

[Information and experts' comments](#)
[Photos & e-banners](#) & [Video](#) (in high resolution)

[Press release in various languages](#)

www.europanostr.org
www.7mostendangered.eu

<http://institute.eib.org>

12 European heritage sites shortlisted for the 7 Most Endangered Programme 2021

(listed in alphabetical order of the country where they are located)

[Achensee Steam Cog Railway, Tyrol, AUSTRIA](#)

The Achensee Steam Cog Railway is the only public railway in the world that, since it was opened in 1889, still uses all of the equipment of a late 19th-century railway system. These elements are steam-locomotives, passenger carriages, an engine-house with sliding platform, workshop, rails, dams and bridges.

In the spring of 2020, the Achensee Railway company went bankrupt and the subsidies which were promised by the Tyrolean provincial government were never disbursed. This authentic example of European industrial heritage is at risk of fast deterioration due to lack of maintenance to ensure its original and continuous function. [ICOMOS Austria](#), as part of ICOMOS, member of the [European Heritage Alliance](#), nominated the Achensee Steam Cog Railway to the 7 Most Endangered Programme 2021.

The Advisory Panel of the Programme commented: *“We hope that possible renegotiations of the funding problems could bear fruit. The public support for saving the railway is growing, not only by the Achensee Support Association’s activities but also the enthusiastic volunteers who run the line single-handedly.”*

[Modern Theatre, Sofia, BULGARIA](#)

Built in 1908, the Modern Theatre in Sofia was one of the first cinemas in Europe. In just five years, it became a most important cultural centre where intellectuals and artists could enjoy both Bulgarian and foreign cinema.

The building was designed by the Bulgarian architect Dimitar Nachev in a Vienna Secession style.

Although the building survived the ravages of the 1944 bombing of Sofia and the subsequent regime changes, the cinema closed its doors in 2013 and has been decaying ever since. The building’s broken windows and partially collapsed roof have left the building exposed to the elements. The building has also been subject to vandalism but fencing has been installed to deter further damage. The decoration of the main facade is at risk.

The nomination of the Modern Theatre for the 7 Most Endangered Programme 2021 was made by an **individual** member of Europa Nostra from Bulgaria.

“The Modern Theatre, being located in a historical neighbourhood with several cultural services, can easily host complementary cultural activities. Moreover, its conservation is vital to consolidating the urban sequence of historical buildings on one of the oldest boulevards of Sofia,” observed the Advisory Panel of the Programme.

Cemetery complex of Mirogoj, Zagreb, CROATIA

Built between 1876 and 1929, the Cemetery Complex of Mirogoj in Zagreb is a fine example of European Neoclassical architecture by the German architect Herman Bollé. Numerous historical figures and Croatian personalities have been buried in Mirogoj, and this contributes to the site’s important emotional significance. In March 2020, the city of Zagreb was hit by a 5.5 Richter magnitude earthquake, which caused severe damage to the site. The walls suffered cracks, the floors were damaged and many architectural and decorative elements have collapsed. The Ministry of Culture and Media of Croatia immediately intervened with emergency measures. However, the site’s structure has also been victim to severe rains, which have occurred in the past months, and to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has impeded damage assessment and conservation processes. The [Ministry of Culture and Media of Croatia](#) nominated the site to the 7 Most Endangered Programme 2021. The Advisory Panel of the Programme noted: *“The Ministry of Culture and Media of Croatia has taken the first crucial steps to protect the site, but international solidarity is greatly needed to rehabilitate Mirogoj”*.

Church of Saint-Denis, Hauts-de-France, FRANCE

The Gothic bell tower of the Church of Saint-Denis in the city of Saint-Omer, Hauts-de-France, is the oldest in the North of France. The church’s interiors feature particularly rich examples of many art movements from the 15th to the 19th centuries. Its altars, made by trade guilds, are rare witnesses to the link between civil society and religious expression.

Today the condition of the Church of Saint-Denis is particularly alarming. Urgent preservation of the church’s roof has been initiated by the city of Saint-Omer, but there lacks funding for a meaningful restoration. The city of Saint Omer proposes to turn the church into a place for learning and experimentation in restoration techniques. The Advisory Panel of the 7 Most Endangered Programme remarked: *“The poor state of conservation of the Church of Saint Denis is emblematic of what is happening to many churches in France and in Europe, which have suffered from decreasing use and failing maintenance. Therefore, the sustainability of this rehabilitation project is linked with outreach to its community and the active involvement of public and private actors”*.

[Future for Religious Heritage](#) nominated the site to the 7 Most Endangered Programme 2021.

Narikala Fortress, Tbilisi, GEORGIA

The Narikala Fortress is one of Tbilisi’s most prominent heritage sites and is one of the oldest historical monuments in Georgia. It forms part of an historical trade route between Europe and Asia (the Silk Road).

The first mention of the fortress in Georgian historical records dates from the late 4th century. Later additions were made to the fortress in the 7th and especially in the 11th centuries.

In 1827, an earthquake destroyed the inner part of the fortification, and severely damaged the external walls. Today, the fortress is at risk of collapse, mainly due to lack of maintenance, hydrogeological issues in the area and general decay. In addition, a high-capacity cable car, built in 2012, has increased visitor access twofold, which in turn has increased the pressure of tourism on the site.

The [Tbilisi Development Fund](#), with the consent of Tbilisi City Hall and with the support of the [Georgian Arts and Culture Centre](#) (GACC), nominated the Narikala Fortress to the 7 Most Endangered Programme 2021.

“Any new use of the Narikala Fortress must be rigorously planned and controlled, prioritising the recovery of the remains of historical structures and the consolidation of archaeological vestiges,” noted the Advisory Panel.

Green Space System, Cologne, GERMANY

Cologne’s Green Space System is a unique urban landscape which has, since its planning phase in the 1920s, foreshadowed the modern “European City”. It repurposed the outdated Prussian weir system into an inner and an outer green space connected and interlocked by green radial corridors and other green facilities. The system consistently combines economic, transport, land, cultural and educational objectives with urban considerations. Cologne’s continued urban growth has been increasingly eating away at the edges of the green space through the expansion of highways and other urban infrastructure. The cumulative effect of these interventions seriously and continually erodes the Green Space System and poses a true threat to the integrity of the city’s green lungs. The [Association for the Protection of Monuments and Landscapes in the Rhineland Area](#) nominated the Green Space System on Cologne to the 7 Most Endangered Programme 2021.

“As Europe moves towards a European Green Deal, which must obviously include urban areas and their special needs in terms of green areas improving city ventilation and quality of life for its citizens, these efforts are all the more exemplary and worthy of Europa Nostra’s support”, said the Advisory Panel of the Programme.

Five Southern Aegean Islands, GREECE

The Five Islands - namely Amorgos, Kimolos, Kithira, Sikinos and Tinos - share the so-called “Cycladic landscape”, which gives them a high cultural and environmental value. This iconic landscape, which forms a

vital part of Greek and also European identity, is formed by the harmonious coexistence between the Aegean Sea, hills, mountains, traditional settlements, monuments and archaeological sites.

This multi-layered landscape is now in grave danger due to the Greek government encouraging its transformation into an industrial zone of wind parks with prominent wind turbines. The plan is to install wind turbines in different parts of each island, often side by side with archaeological sites, some within protected Natura 2000 areas and as a backdrop to traditional villages.

[Elliniki Etairia - Society for the Environment and Cultural Heritage](#) nominated the Five Southern Aegean Islands to the 7 Most Endangered Programme 2021, and asks for alternative and balanced clean-energy solutions rather than wind parks, together with an in-depth consultation process with local communities and experts.

The Giusti Garden, Verona, ITALY

The Giusti Garden, located in Verona, dates back to 1570 and has been open to the public ever since. It is one of the finest examples of a typical Tuscan Renaissance garden that has survived in its original form until the present day and still belongs to the same family. It cultivates various rare species and is home to a boxwood labyrinth in a complex design, one of the oldest of its type in Europe. Its cypress-lined central avenue divides the garden into a labyrinth, on the left, and the parterre, on the right. It also functions as an outdoor theatre.

In 2020, the Garden Giusti was hit by three severe thunderstorms which caused extensive damage to the entire site. About 30 trees - one third of the total - and part of the boxwood labyrinth have been uprooted along with some additional boxwood in the parterre. Three 17th-century statues and the lighting and irrigation systems have also been broken or severely damaged.

“A conservation plan for the Giusti Garden with a strategic pruning and botanical study must be set up and carried out with the aim of enduring any further natural or environmental threat”, stated the Advisory Panel.

An **individual member of Europa Nostra** nominated the garden to the 7 Most Endangered Programme 2021.

The Ca' Zenobio Palace, Venice, ITALY

The Ca' Zenobio Palace, located in the heart of Venice, is a fine example of late Baroque architecture. Built at the end of the 17th century, it comprises a main building hosting a magnificent ballroom and decorated interiors, a courtyard with a Neoclassical loggia and an outstanding Romantic private garden.

The building was home to the prestigious Armenian Moorat-Raphael College from 1851 to 1997. Since the closure of the college, the building has been vacant and exposed to serious deterioration and is at risk of losing its precious characteristics and heritage significance.

“The outstanding artistic and architectural elements are not the only aspects of the Ca' Zenobio Palace that are at risk of being irreversibly lost due to lack of maintenance. Its cultural significance as a symbol of the successful integration of immigrants and as a bridge between European and Middle Eastern cultures are also endangered,” affirmed the Advisory Panel of the 7 Most Endangered Programme.

The **Centre for Studies and Documentation of Armenian Culture in Italy (CSDCA)**, the nominator of the site to the 7 Most Endangered Programme 2021, proposes to rehabilitate and reopen the palace as cultural centre.

Dečani Monastery, KOSOVO* ⁱ

With the creatively combined element of Eastern and Western artistic expressions, its encyclopaedic ensemble of frescoes in Serb-Byzantine style and Romanesque-Gothic architecture and sculptural decoration, the Dečani Monastery is the most distinguished heritage ensembles of its time. Built in the first half of 14th century, this Serbian Orthodox Christian Monastery is also one of the best-preserved medieval monuments in Europe. The monastic complex is enveloped by a beautiful forest which forms part of the surrounding cultural landscape which is inseparable from its priceless cultural heritage. Continuously inhabited for almost seven centuries, the Dečani Monastery is a functioning monastery with daily liturgical services and an active monastic community composed of 25 monks.

The Dečani Monastery was inscribed on the World Heritage List as a single site in 2004. In 2006, this status was extended to three other Serbian Orthodox Christian monasteries and churches in Kosovo, namely Gračanica, the Patriarchate of Peć and the Church of the Virgin of Ljeviš in Prizren. Since 2006, all four sites have been inscribed on the UNESCO List of World Heritage in Danger.

Since June 1999, the Dečani Monastery has been under 24/7 protection by the NATO-led KFOR peacekeeping troops. In spite of this, the monastery was a target of four attacks by mortar grenades by local extremists during the period from 1999 to 2007 as well as an attempted terrorist attack by ISIS in 2016, causing an easily repairable damage. At the same time, the monastery with its special protective zone are facing serious environmental threats. The local municipal spatial plan is not in compliance with the strict protection rules for a UNESCO World Heritage Site or the related national laws and regulations. There is a constant risk of unsuitable urban facilities being constructed in the vicinity of the monastery as well as the danger of expropriation of the land belonging to the Dečani Monastery. Especially dangerous is the plan to have a major international highway pass next to the monastery gates.

The Advisory Panel of the 7 Most Endangered Programme noted: *“It is regrettable that today, the Dečani Monastery with its heritage, both cultural and natural, and its monastic community, have become hostage of the unresolved status of Kosovo*. It is therefore urgent and imperative to ensure the full respect of the rule of law*

and to give stronger attention to the due protection of this World Heritage Site within the on-going talks on the normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Prishtina/Priština. This should be placed in the wider framework of the need to ensure adequate protection and interpretation of the multicultural and multi-religious heritage of Kosovo as a prerequisite for lasting peace and prosperity in the wider region.”

[Future for Religious Heritage](#) nominated the Dečani Monastery to the 7 Most Endangered Programme 2021.

Central Post Office in Skopje, NORTH MACEDONIA

Designed by the North Macedonian architect and artist Janko Konstantinov and finalised in 1974, the Central Post Office represents the modernist Brutalist architectural style of the post-war era. The building's exceptionally powerful structure is made of reinforced concrete, in the shape of a lotus flower, which was intended to symbolize the reconstruction of the city of Skopje after the heavy earthquake of 1963.

The building survived a massive fire in 2013, but, as a consequence, the original glazing of the dome, the murals, and the custom-made furnishings and lighting were either completely lost or suffered serious damage. The building is today even more endangered by disuse and deterioration. As the building still has no roof, it suffers from direct exposure to atmospheric influences with rain and snow penetrating its interior.

The [Institute for Research in Environment, Civil Engineering and Energy](#), which made the nomination to the 7 Most Endangered Programme 2021, advocates for the repurposing of the site as a cultural and social centre.

The Advisory Panel of the Programme stated: “*This is a heritage site of extraordinary significance*” and “*a bold symbol of the rebirth of a city post-earthquake. The Central Post Office needs to be reborn a second time.*”

San Juan de Socueva Chapel and Hermitage, Cantabria, SPAIN

San Juan de Socueva is an ancient hermitage and chapel set into the rocky mountains just south of the municipality of Arredondo, Cantabria, in the north of Spain. The chapel, which has recently been dated back to 660-680 A.D, still maintains its religious function and is deeply rooted in the community.

The chapel's square nave has a sloping north wall of natural stone and a south wall of masonry and plaster. It is separated from the apse with its back-lit altar by a screen topped with a horseshoe opening. There is a 19th-century Neoclassical altar along the outside portico wall with a niche for an image of St. John the Baptist.

The state of conservation of San Juan de Socueva is very worrying. The portico is in an advanced state of disrepair. The monument itself is vulnerable to visitors who can enter freely and cause damage.

[Future for Religious Heritage](#) nominated San Juan de Socueva to the 7 Most Endangered Programme 2021.

“*There is an urgent need to shore up and secure the wooden portico of this significant site of religious heritage. The support and expertise of additional conservation associations and organisations is needed to progress this restoration*”, emphasised the Advisory Panel of Programme.

Background information

[Europa Nostra](#) is the European voice of civil society committed to safeguarding and promoting cultural and natural heritage. A pan-European federation of heritage NGOs, supported by a wide network of public bodies, private companies and individuals, it covers more than 40 countries. Founded in 1963, it is today recognised as the largest and the most representative heritage network in Europe.

Europa Nostra campaigns to save Europe's endangered monuments, sites and landscapes, in particular through the [7 Most Endangered Programme](#). It celebrates excellence through the [European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards](#). Europa Nostra actively contributes to the definition and implementation of European strategies and policies related to heritage, through a participatory dialogue with European Institutions and the coordination of the [European Heritage Alliance](#).

The [European Investment Bank Institute](#) (EIB-I) was set up within the EIB Group (European Investment Bank and European Investment Fund) to promote and support social, cultural, and academic initiatives with European stakeholders and the public at large. It is a key pillar of the EIB Group's community and citizenship engagement. More information on <http://institute.eib.org>

[Creative Europe](#) is the EU programme that supports the cultural and creative sectors, enabling them to increase their contribution to jobs and growth. With a budget of €1.46 billion for 2014-2020, it supports organisations in the fields of heritage, performing arts, fine arts, interdisciplinary arts, publishing, film, TV, music, and video games as well as tens of thousands of artists, cultural and audiovisual professionals. The funding allows them to operate across Europe, to reach new audiences and to develop the skills required in the digital age.

ⁱ * This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.