

COST ACTION C17

“BUILT HERITAGE: FIRE LOSS TO HISTORIC BUILDINGS”

1.1. Title

Fire Protection of Historical Buildings (heritage) in Republic of Bulgaria Statistical Review and Risk Assessment

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Bulgaria was established as a state for more than 1300 years ago. It is situated on a territory where products of human activity are found and preserved and which proves the presence of civilization, art and learning dated V century BC. According the data in the National Institute of monuments of culture (documentary) archive from 2000 there are 39 748 monuments of culture registered. Seven of them are of world-wide importance, 1296 of national importance and the rest are of local importance or only registered. It has to be noticed that monuments of culture are registered in all Bulgarian regions.

The significance of the problem of historical heritage protection in Bulgaria is a consequence not only of the fact that their number is relatively high compared to the number of the population (7 900 000 inhabitants, 111 000 sq.km), but also because of the fact that some of them date from the IV century BC and are of world-wide importance.

The geopolitical and particularly the delicate foreign-political situation in the Balkans where the variety of historical, ethnical, religious and economic problems and contradictions are incited and accelerated by the economic crisis and poverty in the region and by the constant interference of outside (for the region) forces, attach great importance to the role of the monuments of culture as valuables of national and world-wide significance. Their informative and educative value in terms of globalization turn to a consolidating state system factor, firstly by/through forming and becoming stronger of

the national self-consciousness, and secondly, as an objective historical evidence that can solve the contradictions, based on ignorance and speculations in the field of historical awareness and of the historical science.

The interest to the matter is outlined by its significance as well as the complexity of the social, economical and political changes which started in Bulgaria at the end of the Cold War and should become to an end with the act of accepting the country as a full member of the European Union.

The historical traditions and especially the political practice in the period from the end of WW II till the end of Cold War helped in imposing the principles of state control in the Bulgarian society. On the strength of these principles the rights and free will of the individuals are not regarded as their natural rights but as a state management derivatives. To every citizen is assigned the obligation to serve the state, which is an exclusive owner of the national wealth and at the same time because of possessing absolute state power, it is fully entitled to limit the free will of the individual by its decision.

During the period of the so called “socialism” the state becomes owner of most of the historical buildings, including all that are declared as monuments of culture and have world-wide, national and local significance. It should be noticed that during that period the state government made considerable efforts in the field of legislation, financing and science research for discovering and protecting the historical heritage in order to achieve its educational and cultural aims. The last mentioned activity is strongly centralized and the state has the only right to finance and realize it. A large and well-harmonized legal regulation system was built up, which included the Act of monuments of culture, dated 1969, repeatedly amended, organization and mission regulations of the National Institute of monuments of culture, dated 1976 and many other instructions. The Act and the regulations mentioned above are in force nowadays and are the basic structural elements in the legislative system, concerning the protection of historical buildings. Despite of the amendments after the political changes in 1990, these regulations are still loaded/saddled with the ideas and spirit of the state management. This fact leads to some substantial consequences:

1. Despite of the fact that most of the historical buildings in Bulgaria are private property (for example, from 830 historical buildings 799 or 94% of them are private in Varna Region) the state/government strongly limits the rights of the building owners concerning the possession, using and disposition. In return for it, the state is engaged to ensure financial, material and scientific resources for buildings’ preservation and protection. On the other hand the economical crisis imposes state budget restrictions and this does not let the state to carry out its obligations undertaken.
2. As for its legal and organization characteristic features the safety system could be added to the antiquated ‘compensation model’, which was rejected in the 50s. in contrast to that model, the ‘preventive model’ accentuates not on the mechanisms of compensation but on taking precautions, as it is used in well-developed countries, including these in European Union.
3. The above mentioned (p.2) is connected with the fact that interests of the individual, including personal security/safety are put aside, behind the state interests and state property. The results of using ‘compensation model’ are

connected with building up a fire safety system with high level of risk for people, for their life, health and tranquility.

After the first meeting in Brussels of the Management Committee last year, Bulgaria as a participant in COST C 17 had the opportunity to establish business connections with some state institutions. This gave occasion for involving the objectives of COST C 17 the priority scientific research projects of Varna Free University “Chernorizetz Hrabar” (VFU).

We can summarize the actual results as follows:

1. As a consequence of our request the Director of the National Service “Fire and Emergency Safety” under the Ministry of Inner Affairs of Bulgaria gave instructions for carrying out a fire safety and technical investigation of the buildings of historical importance in the country. There were inspected over 2750 buildings all over the country. It was found out that after 1990 fire brigades intervened in 19 fires and 4 average situations/accidents that occurred. In 487 of the inspected historical buildings offences were ascertained, records were drawn up, anti-fire instructions were issued and administrative pains and penalties were inflicted. At the moment the collected information is being analyzed while the statistical data is going to be used in realizing projects connected with risk analyses and risk control.
2. The main subjects of COST C 17 are subjects of the agreement between Varna Free University “Chernorizetz Hrabar” and the National Center for Museums, Galleries and Arts under the Ministry of Culture. The aim is to create a unified data base and information system of the national historical and cultural buildings and monuments, which is a part of the ‘e-government’ project, financed from the Bulgarian Government and other international projects.
3. Activities on COST C 17 are involved in another project concerning the trans-border cooperation in overcoming the consequences of natural disaster and emergency situations which was initially funded by VFU budget.

As a result of the research work and the information based on initial analysis of the legal regulations made by the National Institute of monuments of culture and the National Service “Fire and Emergency Safety” was outlined the structure of the important problem, connected with threats and fire risks for the buildings of historical importance in the country.

The indicated structure involves the following interdependent elements:

1. Firstly, it is the out-of-date legal regulation system, which does not correspond to the new social and economical conditions. In some cases there are antimonies, in others discrepancies to the Constitution. As a result the historical buildings that are private become a burden to their owners, which have to mortgage the property or to find another way to finance the protection and safety of the buildings and at the same time they have to come across a plenty of limitations concerning the possession, using and disposition of the historical heritage. There is a pronounced tendency toward canceling that type of buildings from the list of the monuments of culture, which allows the owners to reconstruct the building without paying attention to their historical value or just to destroy them. Secondly, the antiquated legal regulations

entrust different state and local government bodies with one and the same obligations and powers. This fact helps in increasing the bureaucracy, which the owners of historical buildings have to come across on one hand, and on the other the different bodies that have to supervise and control and have preventive functions in respect of historical heritage have no sound reasons to act the way they have to. Practically the state fire safety control bodies bear the whole responsibility. These bodies, part of which is the National Service “Fire and Emergency Safety” dispose of quite insufficient resources as a result of the restricted budget policy in the last 15 years.

2. After deserting from the problems of the historical heritage on behalf of the state because of reasons mentioned above, the protection matters remain beyond the interests of the scientific and insurance companies. As a consequence, there is a lack of deep scientific, financial and economic researches, treating the historical heritage and its protection. To some extent this research gap could be compensated by passing new legal regulations, protecting the personal safety via the institute of healthy and safety labour conditions and the one defending the consumers of using dangerous goods.

Harmonizing the legal regulations in the field of risk assessment in Bulgaria with similar regulations in European Union was initiated with The Healthy and Safety Labour Conditions Act in 1997. This Act comprises the EU Directive 89/391/EEC requirements where are regulated the rights and obligations of government, employers and employees that ensure healthy and safety labour conditions. Consumers Protection Act, dated 1999 settles the obligations of all subjects who offer services, despite of the organization structure, type of property and the reasons they give up services in order the safety of consumers to be ensured. In 1999 was issued Instruction 5 of Ministry of Labour and social policy of Bulgaria, which comprises the order, procedures and regularity of risk assessment. All these legal regulations, together with Ministry of Inner Affairs Act, which regulates the tasks and activities of the National Service “Fire and Emergency Safety”, Regulation I-61 for certifying objects corresponding to the fire safety requirements, infact lead to the process of assessing the risk in the buildings of historical and cultural significance. Essentially, the risk assessment methods and techniques in Bulgaria are the same used in EU countries, as exposed in TAN 22: Fire Risk Management in Heritage Buildings by Stewart Kidd.

The unfavourable situation connected with the protection of historical in Bulgaria, that was described above shows that the legal regulations that are in force do not work effectively. The reasons for that could be found in the risk structure, which is underlied in the assessing procedures used in the technical and technological spheres. Already in the 17 century in Germany in some theoretical researches on risk was paid attention to the difference between 'threat' and 'risk'. The 'threat' has outward nature. It arises and transforms to a 'risk' irrespective of the subject whose interests are threatened. While talking about the risk, the arising of threat is a result of the decision and the subject's behaviour that follows (activity or inactivity). This statement has a methodological significance because the process of 'decision taking' is constituted as an ewual in rights structural element of risk as the following elements: threat, measurability, the probability of occurring the desired event and the consequences of it, and the hope for success. Each of the four elements of risk (characteristic features of risk) has a practical value as criteria

for classifying the risks. On the other hand the classification and the typology, based on it are important methods for classifying and assessing the risks. In terms of ‘decision taking’ the risks could be classified as risks that you are aware of, and that you are not aware of, reasonable and irrational, meaningful and meaningless and s.o. In this connection we can make the conclusion that the unfavourable situation for protecting heritage buildings is due to the fact that the Bulgarian government and the society as a whole are not aware of the risks. This lead to not taking effective measures for enhancing the level of protection and minimizing the risks from fires in historical buildings.

In this context, the involving of Bulgaria in COST C 17 and our active participation in the future would be of great importance for realizing the nature of the risks, which could be a prerequisite for taking much more effective legislative, organizational, technical and other kind of measures for enhancing the level of fire protection of historical buildings.