



Heritage Alert: Belgrade's 20th Century Heritage at Risk

Press Release

22 November 2024

In light of the reported threats to the Generalštab buildings and the Belgrade Fair complex, the International Council on Monuments and Sites ([ICOMOS](https://www.icomos.org)), through its International Scientific Committee on 20th Century Heritage ([ISC20C](https://www.icomos.org/isc20c)), is issuing an International Heritage Alert to advocate for the conservation of 20th-century heritage in the Serbian capital.

This Heritage Alert responds to imminent risks, including potential delisting, extensive demolition, and significant alterations or construction of new buildings that could reshape and diminish the unique character of both the Dobrovićev Generalštab and the Belgrade Fair complex. It is crucial to highlight that both sites are recognized as part of Serbia's national cultural heritage and valued as significant local assets. In spite of this, recent developments indicate a lack of understanding of their potential and disregard for their importance as cultural heritage for the citizens of Belgrade and Serbia.

In this respect, ICOMOS recalls, as outlined in the [Delhi Declaration on Heritage and Democracy](#), that *"Legislative protection of heritage is the responsibility of all levels of government. Laws and regulations should respect connections between communities and place; foster functional continuities; and require the inclusion of conservation objectives in development initiatives. Heritage management and planning regulations require transparent systems for informing stakeholders, assessing and balancing potentially conflicting views and interests."*¹

ICOMOS recommendations

Given the national and international importance of these sites, ICOMOS and its ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on 20th Century Heritage emphasizes the urgency of raising awareness about their cultural significance.

ICOMOS and its International Scientific Committee on 20th Century Heritage calls on the Belgrade and Serbian authorities to:

1. Retain the listed status of the Generalštab buildings as Serbian cultural heritage, ensuring their appropriate conservation and adaptation.
2. Retain the listing of Hall 1 of the Belgrade Fair complex and extend protection to the entire Fair complex. This includes listing Halls 2, 3, and 4, as they collectively contribute to the cultural significance of the Belgrade Fair and its role in the city's history and development.
3. Establish clear parameters to preserve both cultural heritage sites (Generalštab and Belgrade Fair) in accordance with international standards. ICOMOS, through both the ISC20C and ICOMOS Serbia, stands ready to support this effort.
4. Develop a strategic process to understand, recognize, and protect Belgrade's modern 20th-century heritage. This process should include public engagement to foster broader recognition of the cultural significance of Belgrade's modern heritage within Serbian society.

¹ International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). (2017). *Delhi Declaration on Heritage and Democracy*. Retrieved from <https://www.icomos.org>. The 19th General Assembly of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in Delhi, India on 11–15 December 2017

Belgrade Fair complex

The Belgrade Fair complex is a cultural monument comprising a group of buildings and the surrounding designed fairground, situated along the banks of the Sava River and Vojvode Mišića Boulevard in Belgrade. The innovative urban and architectural solutions applied—particularly the impressive construction methods—contributed significantly to Yugoslavia's international recognition in the 1950s and 60s.

The Belgrade Fairground stands as one of the most valuable works of Serbian Modernist architecture and as a testament to the technical, technological, scientific, and creative advancements of society during this period.

Despite the generally satisfactory state of conservation of the hall buildings, an almost complete lack of maintenance has been noted over the past two years.

Dobrovićev Generalštab

The Dobrovićev Generalštab complex, consisting of the General Staff Headquarters and the Ministry of Defence (originally DSNO – State Secretariat of National Defence), is an architectural and urban ensemble designed by academician and architect Nikola Dobrović. It is located on Kneza Miloša Street in Belgrade.

Completed between 1956 and 1965, this complex represents a significant achievement in Serbian and Yugoslav late-modernist architecture. It is the only work in Belgrade by Dobrović, one of the most prominent Yugoslav architects, theorists, and educators of the 20th century.

Set on a prominent urban site, the complex consists of two twin buildings, popularly nicknamed Sutjeska I and II after the Sutjeska River—a reference to a decisive World War II battle against the Nazis.

Serving as military headquarters until 1999, the buildings were well-maintained until the NATO bombing that year caused significant structural damage to Building Sutjeska I (General Staff Headquarters). Building Sutjeska II (Ministry of Defence) sustained only minor damage.

Vacant since 1999, the Generalštab was listed as a cultural monument by the Government of the Republic of Serbia in 2005.

For more information, [read the full letter sent by ICOMOS to the President of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić.](#)

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The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) is a non-governmental, not for profit international organisation, committed to furthering the conservation, protection, use and enhancement of the world's cultural heritage. www.icomos.org The ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage (ISC20C) focuses on promoting the conservation of twentieth-century places and advocating for sites that are at risk due to neglect, disfiguration and/or development pressure. <https://isc20c.icomos.org/>



Belgrade Fair Complex under construction, Belgrade (ca. 1954–1957)

Photograph by Ranko Laban, postcard. Courtesy of the National Library of Serbia. Source: Photo Documentation Fund, National Library of Serbia, catalog reference Pr 20-XV-6.

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Belgrade Fair, Serbia (2011)

Photograph by Mihajlo Anđelković. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

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Belgrade Fair, Serbia

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Generalštab Buildings, Belgrade (ca. 1965)

Photograph by Branibor Debeljković. Courtesy of the National Library of Serbia. Source: Legacy of Branibor Debeljković, National Library of Serbia, catalog reference BDF 4945-49.

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Generalštab Buildings, Belgrade (before 1999)

Photograph by Bojan Kovačević. Courtesy of Bojan Kovačević.

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Generalštab Buildings, Belgrade (2014)

Photograph by Dumitru Rusu. Courtesy: Dumitru Rusu. Source: *Socialist Modernism in Former Yugoslavia*, by Dumitru Rusu and Sandra Uskoković, Bucharest, 2019. Published by B.A.C.U. Association (Bureau for Art and Urban Research).

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Generalštab Buildings, Belgrade (2014)

Photograph by Dumitru Rusu. Courtesy: Dumitru Rusu. Source: [Socialist Modernism in Serbia](#), published by B.A.C.U. (Bureau for Art and Urban Research).

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Generalštab Buildings, Belgrade (after 1999)
Photograph by Branislav Strugar. Courtesy: Branislav Strugar
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