

Forum: Special Forum for Ukraine

Issue: Protection and reinstatement of the Ukrainian heritage

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Introduction

Ukraine, the Slavic nation, known for its rich history, culture and traditions had recently witnessed its heritage face existential challenges. Ukrainian lands are home to eight of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Ukraine is also home to more than 2,500 wooden churches, or *tserkvas*, the largest number in the world. However, with the currently ongoing armed conflict on its territory, these heritage sites have remained under permanent threat since the beginning of the war, as the country strives towards preserving its cultural and historical identity.

The Ukrainian heritage is an intricate puzzle, reflecting centuries of artistic expression, folklore, and historical milestones. From the prominent architecture of Kyiv's Saint Sophia Cathedral to the haunting melodies of traditional folk music, Ukraine's cultural legacy serves as a testament to the resilience and spirit of its people. However, political unrest, violence, and outside influences have harmed the preservation of these cultural treasures, creating urgency around the restoration and reinstatement of the nation's legacy. In light of the fact that safeguarding cultural resources is both a national priority and a responsibility shared by all people, the international community must assist the Ukrainian people in their efforts to reconstruct and restore their history.

Definition of Key Terms

Heritage

Refers to the features belonging to the culture of a particular society, such as traditions, languages, or buildings, that were created in the past and still have historical importance and relevance.

Shelling

The action of the heavy fire of artillery to saturate an area rather than hit a specific target, usually in the course of the war actions.

Lavra

A lavra is a type of monastery consisting of a cluster of cells or caves for hermits, with a church and sometimes a refectory at the center. Lavra monasteries operate within the Orthodox and other Eastern Christian traditions.

Holodomor

Holodomor refers to the man-made famine that hit the Soviet republic of Ukraine between 1932 and 1933. It was a component of a larger Soviet famine (1931–34) that led to widespread starvation in

Kazakhstan and Soviet Russia's grain-growing regions. The famine in Ukraine, however, was rendered even more deadly by a sequence of political directives and choices directed exclusively towards Ukraine. The term Holodomor is composed of the Russian words for hunger (holod) and extermination (mor), acknowledging the scope of the situation.

Minsk Agreements

Minsk Agreements have been signed between Russian and Ukrainian representatives. This agreement consisted of a set of measures that included a ceasefire, the withdrawal of heavy weaponry from the combat lines, release of prisoners of war, Ukraine granting self-government to certain areas of the region of Donbas and restoring control of the state border to the Ukrainian government.

Background Information

From the more recent periods of Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian control to the ancient legacies of the Scythians and Kyivan Rus, Ukraine's cultural heritage is a mosaic of diverse influences. Customs, music, literature, art and architecture have all contributed to shaping Ukraine's distinct character. Nevertheless, the Holodomor, World War II and Soviet period in the 20th century all had significant influence on Ukrainian culture. After freeing itself from the shadow of the Soviet Union in 1991 the country started its journey towards restoring and rejuvenating its history.

However, since the beginning of military operations on the Ukrainian territory initiated by the Russian Federation on February 24th, 2022, numerous cultural artifacts have been destroyed or severely damaged because of it. The Russo-Ukrainian war had occurred as a result of the escalation of the tensions between the two states, preceded by the annexation of the island of Crimea, and Ukraine's leanings towards western ideologies. The increased tensions have been propelled by Ukraine's ambitions to enter the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Over the coming months, many analysts see a low prospect for a diplomatic settlement and many consider a possibility of dangerous escalation, which may involve Russia and its nuclear weaponry. In addition to the tangible and intangible cultural heritage that has been harmed by the conflict, the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine estimates that since February 24th, 2022 has documented 835 instances of destruction or damage to cultural legacy sites.

Religious heritage

The conflict in Ukraine has led to significant losses in cultural heritage, particularly religious monuments. The Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the village of Vyazivka, Zhytomyr region, dated to 1862, suffered a complete destruction due to an intense shelling. Similarly, the wooden church of St. George in Zavorychi, Kyiv region, dating back to 1873, faced a similar fate, as result of a bombardment it had met a tragic end. Moreover, the centuries-old Holy Dormition Sviatohirsk Lavra had been subjected to an attack in March 2023, adding to its ongoing troubles near the frontline.

Museal heritage

The museums, which are usually recognised as the main locations of cultural heritage, have not been exempt. The remarkable works of Ukrainian artist Maria Prymachenko (1909-1997) were housed in the Museum of History and Local Lore in the city of Ivankiv, and had been demolished by pounding. Similarly, the works of a culturally significant artist Arkhip Kuindzhi (1841-1910), which had been stored in the Kuindzhi Art Museum in the city of Mariupol, which had over two thousand exhibits, had been torn down in cause of a strike, raising questions about the future of its priceless collections. These incidents are a small portion of the extensive and intentional damage that is taking place in Ukrainian museums; there have been several reports of attacks on the museums in Mariupol and Kherson, as well as on the Scythian gold collection from Melitopol. The memorial to the victims of the Holodomor, was demolished by Russian military authorities in Mariupol. This was done in order to conceal the famine's man-made origin and its acknowledgment as a genocide. In addition to breaking The Hague Convention, the destruction of these cultural heritage items is a deliberate attack on Ukraine's cultural and historical values in addition to its national character.

Infrastructural heritage

Ukraine's cultural and historical legacy includes its infrastructure, which has taken a notable portion of damage from the ongoing armed conflict. Kharkiv, a city commonly used as a representation of the Ukrainian infrastructural heritage, had been no exception. Once a display of Soviet architectural mastery, the city of Kharkiv, has also seen the destruction of cultural treasures: Kharkiv's infrastructure is undermined by the demolishing of several important squares, streets, the Palace of Labor, university buildings, research organisations, an opera theater, a central cathedral, art museums, schools, fire stations, and more. Likewise, the 400,000-person residential neighborhood of Saltivka, a post-World War II modernist masterpiece, had been erased by the virtue of a storming.

Similarly, Mariupol, a commercial port city on the Sea of Azov that served as the hub for the Greek and other minority populations in Ukraine, is one of the places that has sustained the greatest damage during the dispute. The industrial architecture of the 1930s, represented by the Azovstal steel works, Ukrainian Soviet art, and the Soviet neoclassical Donetsk Academic Regional Drama Theater, just to name a few, were bombed on March 16 — had all once contributed to the city's architectural identity throughout the Soviet era. There were still some pre-First World War structures, including the old "Continental" Hotel, in addition to several manors, schools, residential structures, libraries, museums, churches, and mosques. This extensive list of cultural treasures that are impacted by the current military actions emphasizes how urgently the world has to awaken and work together to preserve this legacy that is always in danger due to the war actions.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

Ukraine

Ukraine is subjected to the loss of its own cultural and historical heritage, as a result of the armed conflict on its territory. Over the course of the war, numerous infrastructural segments, historical artifacts and religious establishments had been lost in the virtue of the military actions.

Russian Federation

The Russian Federation is the largest country on the globe, which Ukraine borders. It is the one commonly associated with the destruction of Ukrainian cultural and historical property due to conducting the military operations on its territory.

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and European Union

NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, is a military alliance comprising 31 member countries committed to collective defense against aggression. Its primary goal is to ensure the security and stability of its member nations through mutual cooperation and the collective defense provision.

The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union of 27 member states that aims to promote economic integration, cooperation, and peace among its member countries.

Both organisations had prompted the escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian tensions, however, both EU and NATO are making efforts towards preservation and restoration of the Ukrainian heritage through financial aid and campaigning.

UNESCO

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, is a specialised UN agency that promotes international collaboration in education, science, and culture. Its mission includes promoting cultural understanding, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting the universal access to education for everyone. This agency is diligently involved in protection of the Ukrainian heritage: they frequently assess the damage, launch initiatives and provide resources.

Timeline of Events

Date	Name	Description
1991	Ukraine gained independence	In 1991 Ukraine gained independence from Moscow, shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union.
2014-04	Independence of Donbass	Pro-Russians in the eastern region of Donbass declared independence. Around 15,000 people have been killed since 2014 in the battles. This was a turning point for the escalation of tensions.
2014	Crimea Annexation	One of the events that led to the full-scale war was

		the Crimea annexation. Since 2014 the peninsula of Crimea has been located on Russian territory.
2022-02-24	The beginning of the military actions	On February 24th, 2022 the armed conflict began, and marked the commencement of the destruction of Ukrainian historical and cultural property.
2022-02-27	Chernihiv Bombing	On February 27th, the regional youth centre in Chernihiv, one of the few remaining monuments from the 1930s, was bombed.
2022-03-07	Vyazevka Bombing	As a result of an attack on the village of Vyazevka several 19th-century wooden churches were demolished.
2022-03-12	Shelling of the Holy Dormition Sviatohirsk Lavra	On March 12th, as a result of an attack, the Lavra built in the 17th to 19th centuries, an architectural monument of national importance. Due to the fact that the Lavra is situated close to the combat lines, it has suffered enormously.
2022-03-16 to 2022-03-21	Bombing of Mariupol	As a result of shelling in Mariupol, multiple historical sites and monuments have been destroyed, including Donetsk Academic Regional Drama Theater, Kuindzhi Art Museum and "Continental" Hotel.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- The UN Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, 14 May 1954
- 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention
- The Security Council Uniting for Peace Resolution from February 27th, 2022 (S/RES/2623)
- General Assembly Resolution for the Withdrawal of the Russian Troops from Ukraine, March 2nd, 2022 (A/ES-11/L.7)
- 2023 UNESCO list of heritage in danger (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/danger/>)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Numerous international organisations and countries have partnered with Ukraine to create cooperative projects that are intended to protect and revitalise its cultural and historical legacy. Acknowledging the inherent worth of Ukraine's historical and artistic assets, these collaborations represent a shared dedication to preserving the country's identity and adding to the worldwide fabric of our common human legacy.

UNESCO

Following the attack on Ukraine by the Russian Federation on 24 February 2022, UNESCO advocates respect for international humanitarian law and takes emergency measures in Ukraine as a part of its mandate in the fields of education, science, culture, information and communication. The organisation is closely monitoring the situation on the ground, be it security journalists covering conflict, the preservation of cultural heritage or access to education for children and young people. With the assistance of its UN Member States and other partners, UNESCO has so far raised more than \$43 million to carry out particular initiatives that address the needs raised by the public and professionals. From the outset of the conflict, UNESCO specialists advised cultural workers in Ukraine on how to safeguard structures, enhance fire safety measures, and locate secure locations for movable artwork. The organisation has also supplied electric generators and protective materials for outdoor artwork like statues and the facades of cultural buildings. UNESCO backs the Ukrainian government's efforts to designate cultural sites with the Blue Shield emblem.

World Monuments Fund

In order to meet the urgent needs of heritage professionals in Ukraine and to establish the framework for the long-term recovery and rehabilitation of the nation's cultural heritage, the World Monuments Forum (WMF) has initiated a number of new projects under the fund. One of their projects is the Black House Project, for example. Market Square in Lviv is home to the 16th-century Black House. These days, the elaborately sculpted building facade is especially exposed to damage from ballistic missile explosions that occur nearby. WMF is collaborating with the Lviv Historical Museum and Friends of the Lviv Historical Museum to construct a sturdy external structure that will preserve the decorative façade while paying homage to the architectural and historical significance of Market Square. This project is made possible by funding from the U.S. Department of State through the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP) and the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv.

The United Nations demands for peace

The United Nations General Assembly had attempted to call the conflicting states upon creating a peace agreement or a ceasefire by crafting a resolution. The UN General Assembly called for ending the war in Ukraine and demanded Russia's immediate withdrawal from the country, in line with the UN Charter. The results were 141 Member States in favor and seven against - Belarus, the Democratic

People's Republic of Korea, Eritrea, Mali, Nicaragua, Russia and Syria. Among the 32 abstentions were China, India and Pakistan.

Possible Solutions

The protection of cultural heritage in Ukraine is crucial because it is not only a testimony of the past, but also key to future peace and cohesion. Heritage is the bedrock of Ukrainian identity, providing the population with a sense of belonging. The below-listed measures must be implemented in order to ensure the safety and security of all forms of heritage from the aftermath of the war.

Legal Protocols

In times of conflict, legal protections are essential for maintaining cultural heritage. Enforcing and putting into effect international agreements, such as the 1954 The Hague Convention and its addenda, are crucial. These agreements specify the obligations of states during armed conflict and provide a framework for the protection of cultural assets.

Marking cultural sites with well-known symbols, such as the Blue Shield logo, is also an essential part of this protection. This emblem emphasizes the significance of these places and signals the possible legal repercussions for harming or targeting them. It also acts as a visible indicator that certain sites are granted special status under international law. The world community can cooperate to protect the sanctity of cultural assets even in the face of difficulties during a war by abiding by these legal rules.

Security measures

In times of conflict, the protection of cultural assets depends on the implementation of security measures. Creating thorough security measures for cultural institutions requires the application of particular tactics, such as installing sophisticated monitoring systems with motion sensors and CCTV cameras to improve surveillance capabilities. In order to guarantee a proactive and responsive defense against such threats, it is also essential to deploy security staff who are well-trained and have experience protecting cultural assets.

A concrete plan can include the methodical evacuation and transfer of valuable artifacts to specially designated secure storage facilities that are outfitted with cutting-edge security features and climate control in case the conflict escalates. For instance, priceless artwork, sculptures, and antiquities could be categorised, meticulously packed, and moved to vaults off-site that are built to resist the effects of war. Cultural institutions can greatly improve their preparation and resilience by incorporating these particular measures into their security strategies. This will protect their priceless cultural assets from potential harm during times of increased instability.

Recovery plans

In order to guarantee the prompt preservation of cultural heritage in times of emergency, efficient inventory and recovery plans are essential. The maintenance of comprehensive inventories of cultural

sites and artifacts forms an essential basis for these endeavors. This entails thorough documentation that makes tracking and recovery easier and includes item descriptions, photos, and location information. Simultaneously, it is critical to create detailed plans for the quick recovery and transfer of artifacts in case of emergency. This could include creating lists of artifacts that are ranked according to their cultural significance and degree of vulnerability, enabling a methodical approach to recovery efforts. To reduce the possibility of damage or loss, a plan might, for example, include pre-established protocols for packing and delivering artifacts to safe and secure areas.

A Peace Agreement

An immediate peace agreement between the warring states is crucial in the urgent pursuit of protecting the cultural and historical heritage. An end to hostilities is necessary for the preservation of cultural treasures, which serve as archives of the nation's history and identity. In addition to stopping the looting and destruction of priceless artifacts, an immediate peace agreement would allow for cooperative efforts to put protective measures in place for cultural sites that are at risk. The nations concerned can build a foundation for mutual understanding and lay the groundwork for international cooperation in the careful preservation and restoration of our priceless cultural heritage by placing a high priority on diplomacy and dialogue. Beyond political divides, this cause demands a unifying dedication to the timeless principles ingrained in our common past. Only through a commitment to peace can we ensure that future generations inherit a world enriched by cultural expressions that define our common humanity.

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