

BELARUS

State of Preservation of the Historic City of Hrodna

Hrodna is listed among the oldest Belarusian cities founded at the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries. The historic and cultural heritage accumulated in the 1000 years of its existence is an outstanding example of urban architecture which is a mixture of contacts and interrelations with Western European as well as Byzantine culture and of local traditions. Among the unique architectural monuments of the city there were five 12th-century churches. At present, the historic and cultural potential of the city comprises more than 400 monuments, located in the historic city centre.

In recent years, the condition of Hrodna's monuments and their legal status has been deteriorating. In 1992 the only Hrodna firm working in the restoration field had to stop its activities so that the planned restoration programmes were not carried out. This concerns several individual monuments in the city centre and the planned restoration of the Old Castle from the Renaissance. Consequently, for 15 years no conservation work, so urgently needed for preserving Hrodna's heritage, has been done. The current state of conservation of Hrodna's cultural heritage can be described in the following way:

1. At present, the city authorities do not have any general preservation programme for the historic centre, since they have no understanding for the essential role of the historic and cultural potential of this city and consider this potential as useless lumber.
2. At the same time, the city authorities have launched large-scale municipal improvement activities called "reconstruction" or "restoration". In fact, these measures are reduced to a minimum: mere replacement of old pavements in the centre by modern concrete tiles, simple repair of old stone buildings, repainting of facades, covering of roofs with metal profile sheets, and destruction of green zones. These so-called municipal "improvements" are being undertaken by considerably violating Belarusian laws concerning the preservation of historic, archae-

ological and cultural heritage. They also ignore the rules and methods of restoration and of conservation operations. One of the elements of so-called "restoration" is the planned gradual demolition of Hrodna's historic centre. In 2005/2006 many architectural landmarks were demolished, including monuments of Constructivism (see <http://harodnia.com/a34.php>).

3. The 2003 general plan of the city of Hrodna underlined the necessity of clearing the historic city centre in order to make way for a public recreation area for pedestrians. However, in 2006 the city authorities built a four-lane road through the centre resulting in the demolition of many foundations of 16th-18th-century stone buildings as well as in a partial or complete loss of archaeological strata (<http://harodnia.com/f04.php>; <http://harodnia.com/f01.php>). Archaeological excavations started with delay and covered only a limited area (<http://harodnia.com/f06.php>).
4. The local authorities are planning to build more road sections through the historic city centre, for example by widening and reconstructing Padgornaya Street and constructing a parallel to Vialikaya Trayetskaya Street. This plan will lead to further destruction of the townscape (including Nioman bank terraces) and have negative impact on architectural monuments (such as Old and New castle, the synagogue and others).
5. The authorities rejected all alternative proposals made by town-planners and historians that would offer solutions for reconstruction and for traffic improvements in the historic centre of Hrodna.

For more information see also:

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2006/08/11/belarus>

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Hrodna, historic view of the Old Castle



Hrodna, Old Castle, inadequate renovation work (Photo: A. Milinkevich)

