

CROATIA – HERITAGE @ RISK!



Vukovar. The church of St Roch and Eltz Palace after their destruction

Eltz Palace, detail of the façade



At the beginning of a short survey on Heritage @ Risk in Croatia the reports should be referred to that have already been published and collected by the documentation- and information centre of the State Monument Preservation Department, and to the threatening number of historic heritage places and sites destroyed during the war in 1991/1992 by attacks of the Yugoslav army and paramilitary forces. Almost all regions of Croatia were involved somehow, and together with villages and historic sites many single monuments were damaged or destroyed. The target of attacks was often ecclesiastical buildings, hundreds of churches and convents, among them pre-Romanesque and Romanesque churches in the occupied regions of Dalmatia. In contradiction to all international conventions, the cultural heritage has thereby been purposely attacked and systematically destroyed, and even more so, when these buildings had the sign of the Hague Convention. Even after the end of the threat of war the systematic destruction of cultural evidence was carried out, churches were undermined or blown up, historic quarters were levelled with bulldozers, movable cultural heritage sacked or stolen. A world wide storm of indignation was aroused by the vandalism during the attacks on Dubrovnik. The city, already inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1979, has been restored thanks to international help so that it is no longer among the Heritage at Risk. But, the reconstruction and restoration of cultural monuments around Dubrovnik, where villages and woods have been burnt down systematically, will still need a long time.

In Northern Croatia, where the affected monuments of the town of Osijek have meanwhile been restored in an exemplary manner, the township of Vukovar and the palace of Eltz (1749) have been most heavily affected; for the ruined remains of the Catholic Church of Vukovar there seems to be no hope.

Some of the at times only fragmentarily preserved works of art saved from destroyed churches are undergoing expert restoration in a collaboration between the Bavarian State Department of Historic Monuments and the recently installed restoration centre in Ludbreg Castle near Varazdin. Apart from the consequences of war the conservators of historic monuments in Croatia have to fight against the disturbance of historic urban complexes and the destruction of cultural landscapes as well as against the consequences of air pollution, which is affecting for example the marble in the region of ancient Pula and Split. In one of the historic quarters of the Palace of Diocletian in Split the unnecessary pulling down of buildings from the post-Roman period in order to uncover the remains from the Roman period, has been realised in the meantime as a mistake.