

Moscow, one of the largest public museums in Europe was tragically destroyed: the Museum by name of N.K. Roerich of the International Centre of the Roerichs in Moscow

*Appeal of Marga Koutsarova, lawyer for International Right (Bulgaria),
on the occasion of the press conference in Tallinn March 15th, 2017*

The museum named after N.K. Roerich of the International Centre of the Roerichs is a world-class museum. For its services in the preservation of cultural heritage and the development of museum studies, its permanent General Director Lyudmila Shaposhnikova (1926-2015) twice received state awards of Russia - the Order of Friendship of Peoples in 2006 and the Order of Merit for the Fatherland IV degree in 2011. For the restoration of Lopoukhin Manor, which accommodates the non-governmental Museum by name of N.K. Roerich, in the very centre of Moscow, its general director Lyudmila Shaposhnikova received in 2010 the European Union Prize "Europe Nostra". It is possible to enumerate for a long time the high awards of the International Centre of the Roerichs and its non-governmental Museum for their achievements in the area of science and culture.

However, today a terrible thing happened - the non-governmental Museum by name of N.K. Roerich of the International Centre of the Roerichs was tragically destroyed. This is one of the largest non-governmental museums in Europe!

In this regard, as an international lawyer, I am obliged to say the following. The destruction of the non-governmental Museum by name of N.K. Roerich was carried out with a gross violation of all basic principles of law!

The Russian Federation legislation, as well as norms and standards of international law were violated.

Without a legal judgment, on the ***night*** of April 28, a day off on the eve of the holidays (Saturday) on April 29, and at ***night*** on April 29, ***not by the judicial bodies*** of the Russian Federation, but by the power bodies that do not have the corresponding powers:

- Lopoukhin Manor was seized from the International Centre of the Roerichs, in which its non-governmental Museum by name of N.K. Roerich was located;
- all the Roerich heritage legally owned by the International Centre of the Roerichs was seized. This is the legacy transferred to the Centre by S.N. Roerich, and the legacy that the ICR acquired for a quarter of a century of its existence, thanks to the donations of patrons;
- all property, all documents, the whole archive, including the electronic archive, were seized.

All this was done without any legal basis! I do not know of another such grave crime in the field of culture today in Europe!

Such **reprisal**, carried out by the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation and the State Museum of Oriental Art - is a precedent in the modern history of Russia!

It must also be said that what was committed on April 28 and 29, 2017 contradicts all international norms, all international standards, which concern non-governmental museums, as well as the activities of public organizations in the field of culture.

All rights of the international non-governmental organization - International Centre of the Roerichs are violated!

All cultural rights of the members of the ICR and members of its staff are violated!

Unfortunately, the complete lack of experience in the USSR with regard to non-governmental museums has led to the fact that currently the legislation of the Russian Federation does not regulate a significant number of issues related to the activities of non-governmental museums, and administrative practice shows a complete lack of understanding of the very possibility of the existence of a public, non-state, independent museum. The result of this was that the change of the Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation in 2012, in the absence of an appropriate legislative framework, led to the policy openly announced by the current leadership of the Ministry of the Russian Federation for the destruction of the non-governmental N.K. Roerich Museum of the ICR.

Non-governmental, independent museums have proved their importance and contribution to the development of human society. The very first, the oldest museum in the Netherlands - the Taylor Museum- was created as a non-governmental one and still exists and works in the status of non-governmental. In the UK there is a wealth of experience in relation to non-governmental museums, which in this country are called independent. Most museums in the United States work in the organizational form of non-profit organizations. **The successful operation of the N.K. Roerich Museum of the International Centre of the Roerichs proved the enormous potential of public museums in Russia.**

Non-governmental museums are the guarantee of freedom for the development of art, science, philosophy. This freedom is extremely important for the development of society!

Given that non-governmental museums create the space of a free and independent culture, we consider it expedient to encourage their development not only in Russia, but throughout the world.

Instead, we witnessed the destruction of one of the largest, successful non-governmental museums in Europe - the N.K. Roerich Museum of the ICR.

In view of the extremely grave nature of the complete destruction of the non-governmental Museum, which is essentially a crime in the field of culture, **we fully support the call of the International Centre of the Roerichs to create an international working group** that will investigate the alleged destruction of the Museum of N.K. Roerich of the ICR, will work out the necessary steps for returning the Roerichs' heritage and its buildings to the International Centre of the Roerichs, and will prescribe the necessary legislative provisions that should not allow the destruction of any non-governmental museum anywhere in Europe, anywhere in the future!

Hundreds of thousands of people today in Russia and in Europe are waiting for justice, waiting for restoration of rights of the ICR and the non-governmental Nicholas Roerich Museum!