

Public Museum in the light of international standards

*Speech of Halina Schneider, chairwoman of Deutsche Roerich-Gesellschaft (Germany),
on the occasion of the press conference in Tallinn March 15th, 2017*

We represent the cultural Roerich organizations of Europe, and closely cooperate with the ICR for many years. Many of the members of our organizations participated in the creation of the non-governmental Museum by name of N.K. Roerich in Moscow.

One month ago, in the centre of Moscow, an outrageous fact occurred: Late in the evening, directly after a concert of the famous Bulgarian pianist Anastas Kurtev, without any legal grounds, the staff of the International Centre of the Roerichs and its non-governmental Museum were expelled by force from the occupied buildings and the museum had been closed. A present, there is a direct threat to the safety of the collection. Not only the non-governmental museum suffered, but also the right for independent culture.

The destruction of the non-governmental museum is directly related to us, too. We actively participated in international cultural and peace-making projects conducted by the ICR - namely seminars, exhibitions, culture days, which raised N. Roerich's ideas about the need to protect culture, but also raised the image of Russia as a country of high culture. Now, the International Organization "ICR" was slandered, numerous trials were instituted against it, it was even accused of spreading the fascist swastika... And, it is all addressed to us, too! In addition, all this applies to the leadership of the Russian Federation, which has repeatedly awarded the ICR with high awards for the preservation and popularization of the heritage of the Roerichs, for the restoration of the architectural monument "Lopoukhin Manor", for the large-scale exhibition project "The Roerich Pact. History and modernity." A question arises: Was this all untrue, undeserved?

The basic rule of modern international standards (set forth in the acts of UNESCO) is the **independence of a non-governmental** cultural organization. State bodies should not participate as founders and its members, should not interfere with its decisions and activities. Non-governmental organizations and the state should **cooperate based on equality**.

The creation of a "manipulated" public, which is now actively executed by the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, is contradicting these principles. The attempts to become a "coordinator" for a public movement consisting of non-governmental organizations means to wish to subordinate them. This attempt is even more surprising considering the **international** character of the Roerich movement. The wish to subordinate is witnessing of disrespect.

Such a brutal and illegal action to the well-known non-governmental organization ICR, which took place April 28-28, 2017, damages the reputation of Russia itself, and the leadership of the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation must realize and understand it. The destruction of the cultural organization, which has done so much for the country, destroys those cultural ties between Russia and international organizations that were established not just one year ago.

The creation of the state museum of the Roerich family on ruins and at the expense of the property of the non-governmental museum of the ICR will not give the results expected by them, despite all efforts to give to this cynical process a touch of "legality". Here are some words from the answers we received from the Ministry of Culture: "The placement of the state museum of the Roerichs at Lopoukhin Manor would be a worthy realization of the original desire of S. N. Roerich about the museum". That is, to assign the *property* of Svetoslav Roerich, which he personally handed over to the International Center of the Roerichs, and expel the non-governmental Museum of the ICR from Lopoukhin Manor, which had been restored by the ICR from the ruins entirely on public funds. Is this supposed to be the worthy realization of Svetoslav Roerich's desire?

The current leadership of the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation prefers not to notice the objective reality of the existence of the ICR and its successful activities, disseminating in its texts information that is absolutely untrue. The non-governmental museum is presented by the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation as a kind of private, closed organization that can ransack the heritage at any time, deprive Russia of wealth. This is a defamation of the non-governmental museum, it is the crossing out of everything done in 26 years of successful work! The collection of the non-governmental Museum by the name of N.K. Roerich of the ICR has not diminished by any picture. On the contrary, during these years many valuable things had been donated to the museum, including paintings by the Roerichs.

The leadership of the Russian Federation has always advocated the observance of international law. This, of course, strengthens the authority of Russia and can only inspire respect. But how should we understand the actions of the leadership of the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, which directly and roughly violate international standards concerning non-governmental organizations?

Some Important aspects:

- **observance of the will of the donor (donors);**
- **the museum belongs to the whole nation** (national treasure), regardless of its belonging, being a state or non-state museum;
- **the permanence of existence of a museum.**

EURASSIM, the European Association for Support of the ICR and the Public Museum by name of N.K. Roerich, is not standing alongside with indifference. Some of the most important issues are under concern: freedom of citizens, human rights, the will of donors is violated, an unprecedented robbery of a non-governmental museum takes place.

We are shocked by the lack of any adequate response from the ICOM National Committee of Russia to the ICR appeal. Representatives of other national committees, in particular Germany, expressed their bewilderment and sympathy for the harsh actions against the non-governmental museum. The National Committee of Russia expressed nothing, no request, no reaction.

Does this mean that it has already been decided at a high level that the non-governmental Museum by name of N.K. Roerich of the ICR has no right to exist?! Does this mean that the will of the donor can be forgotten, not fulfilled? Does this mean that it is now dangerous to give museums cultural values, that it is dangerous to protect culture?! Does this mean that

everything can be changed if there is power? The former chairman of the Supreme Arbitration Court of Russia, Anton Ivanov, recently said at the Legal Forum in St. Petersburg on May 17, 2017: "State bodies are built in such a way that the skill of a lawyer in dealing with them does not matter. You can be an excellent specialist and speaker, but if there is a decision to solve the case bypassing the law, you cannot overcome."

We express our protest against the illegal forceful methods by structures of force and appeal to the leadership of the Russian Federation to stop the illegal actions against the International Centre of the Roerichs and its non-governmental museum. However, most important, to reestablish the work of the non-governmental Museum by name of N.K. Roerich at Lopoukhin Manor.