



CURIA EPISCOPALIS TIMISOARENSIS

Episcopia Romano-Catolică/ Római Katolikus Püspökség /Bischöfliches Ordinariat

RO 30055 TIMIȘOARA – CETATE

str. Augustin Pacha nr. 4

Tel. 0040 256490 081, 0040 256433 054, Tel-Fax 0040 256497 201, secretar@episcopiarctm.ro

Nr. 1538 / 2015

PRESS RELEASE

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear representatives of the press,

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Timișoara is showing concern about an article published in the online version of the English newspaper *The Telegraph* on August 3rd, 2015. This material referred, among many other things but above all, to the renovations of the Maria Radna Papal Basilica and the adjacent former Franciscan monastic complex. At a time of celebration and joy as the day of August 2nd, 2015, when the renovation work received the blessing to begin, the material published by the above-mentioned newspaper leaves us with a bitter taste. It was precisely by the massive interest shown by the national and international mass media that the event could be broadcast by public, private and ecclesiastic television channels, as well as written about in the printed and online press. The photographs taken prove to a whole country and to Europe a reality different from the one described by Mr. Dale-Harris in his column. At the event, all journalists who attended it, i.e. all who requested to be present, received certifications and passes, as well as detailed information from our institution, which is necessary to their well informing public opinion.

What also saddens us extremely is that the text we are talking about, published in Sibiu by Mr. Luke Sale-Harris, has been taken over by the national Romanian press. Once again, no one asked us any questions about the event, let alone about the renovation project, thus multiplying and developing theories that have nothing to do with reality. Therefore, we find ourselves forced to request the national and international press for our right to comment and make the following specifications regarding the Maria Radna architectural and religious objective:

As project beneficiary, we strongly reject the accusations that various stone or wooden pieces from the roofs or walls of the basilica or the monastery, items found in any conservation state, have been sold in Germany by the Diocese or with its approval. As it was also publicly mentioned by the superiors of our Diocese and during the ceremony of August 2nd, the site is not yet ready. Repair works will be carried out even after August 2nd, and the stone of various types and sizes, which was salvaged from the architectural complex, has been stored and will be reused in the project.

The project was based on well researched studies of the current situation, taking into consideration the fact that the monument suffered multiple damage and modifications during the past century (for example, a fire in 1923; inadequate and brutal usage of the space between 1948 and 2003; unprofessional work on plaster coats, roofing and flooring). Contrary to

accusations, the authentic materials from the complex were cleaned of parasites, restored and made noticeable. Only the roof elements that had no historical value were replaced (fiber concrete composite panels from the early 1900s and the corrugated iron panels installed over the past decades). We would like to mention the fact that the roof of the basilica was already restored in 1997 and not during this project. The timber supports of the towers are covered with copper sheets, a material identical with the original one used in 1911. The ornamental vases, which embellish the four corners on each tower, are original to 1911 and have been minimally restored.

The existing woodwork, both in the basilica and in the Franciscan monastic building, was as far as possible retained and restored, and where necessary, it was replaced by newer woodwork, in compliance with current architectural and heritage regulations.

The accusation according to which the stone was replaced with concrete bricks is biased and unfounded because, in actual fact, it was quite the opposite. The 20th century concrete stairs were replaced with massive slabs of natural stone, and the cement plaster coat was replaced with a damp-proofing plaster coat, which is preferred in restoration work.

During the current works, the Franciscan cloister building has not suffered any structural modernization interventions, which would change its architecture. With the exception of the domes and arches, the monastery did not have any Baroque decoration, nor does it have any today, as the Franciscan Order itself is characterized by a very austere style. On the other hand, the last wings of the monastery were completed in 1826, a year when the Baroque was no longer fashionable in Europe, nor in Romania. The Baroque elements of the basilica façade were retained and restored, while some stone door and window frameworks were cleaned of subsequent stains of cement or layers of paint. They have received a new lease on life and can be admired today. Unfortunately, the photographs that Mr. Luke Dale-Harris has used to illustrate his article are old and do not represent reality or the actual state of the buildings.

In addition to this, concrete and reinforcing iron were first used at Maria Radna in innovative construction work in 1911, when the basilica towers were raised and given the monumental aspect they now have. The work was considered valuable, as part of the monument's history and was consequently retained.

The comparison to a Disney castle is completely inadequate and damages not only the prestige of the basilica, the Franciscan century-old history, the architectural complex, and the entire project, but also all those involved in the laborious and painstaking work on this project. The yellow shades used for the façades of the architectural complex formed by the basilica and the monastery may not be entirely known, historically and artistically, by the author of the material we are referring to here. We specify that the dominant yellow shade used at Radna is in fact the original colour of the complex exterior, known in architecture and art history as "Kaisergelb" (imperial yellow) or "Schönbrunner Gelb" (Schönbrunn yellow), a colour used during the Habsburg rule in the 18th century on all public buildings, be they civil or ecclesiastic ones.

We stipulate that the financing, done with European funds for the Maria Radna project, amounts to 26,075,301.16 lei, namely 5,795,000 euros. At the end of the project, the exact amounts will be made public, as they are calculated after the completion of the restoration works. We mention the fact that Mr. Luke Dale-Harris requested some information about the project to be implemented in April 2015, and on April 7th, 2015, he was sent all data regarding the implementation of the project: the most recent Progress Report, the Works Agreement, as

well as all sources so that he could access the relevant assignation documentation for the construction works. Thus, as early as April 7th, 2015, Mr. Luke Dale-Harris was aware of the project value and of all its technical details.

We do not know Mr. Luke Dale-Harris' source concerning the workers – their wages, ages, social or marital status – but, as beneficiary, our Diocese underlines the fact that none of the people involved in the works on the site is underage, too young or too old, or a prisoner in the custody of one prison or other. Each employee's payment represents an internal matter, regulated in the agreement between the contractual firms as employers, and each and every employee.

We strongly reject and express our total disagreement with the allegation that the amounts of money used in the project would be circulated between the beneficiary and the contractual companies. All the companies involved were selected during public auctions, and works were assigned to companies that count among their employees certified specialists in the rehabilitation of historical monuments. At the start as well as during the progress of works, all procedures required by European Union-funded projects have been observed.

The project has received the approval of the Historical Monuments National Commission, issued by the Romanian Ministry of Culture through the Historical Monuments Department, and it was written by a multidisciplinary team of certified specialists in the field, according to the requirements of Romanian legislation and European Union procedures.

Our Diocese shows once more their complete openness to the press and to all those interested in an honest and unbiased access to all the details necessary to well and accurately inform the national and international public opinion.

Timisoara, August 4th, 2015

Priest Nicolae Lauș
Director of the Diocese Chancellery