



**The 7 Most Endangered 2018**  
Programme run by **Europa Nostra**,  
the Voice of Cultural Heritage in Europe,  
in partnership with the **European Investment Bank Institute**

## **Post Byzantine monuments in Voskopoja and Vithkuqi Albania**

### **Technical Report**

#### **Table of contents**

1. Summary
2. Purpose, location
3. Context
4. Description
5. Technical aspects
6. Implementation
7. Procurement
8. Environment, sustainability, social
9. Use, market, demand
10. Operation and maintenance
11. Investment cost
12. Financing possibilities
13. Conclusions: Proposed actions and recommendations

#### Appendices:

1. References, mission details
2. Details of the churches and cost estimates
3. Restoration of frescos by Dr Paolo Vitti
4. Recent photographs

**Peter Bond**  
**Lourdes Llorens Abando**  
Consultants EIB Institute  
Luxembourg

10<sup>th</sup> December 2018

## 1. Summary

The project consists of restoring twelve religious buildings comprising ten churches and two monasteries, the earliest dating from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century and most dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. They are all located in or close to the villages of Voskopoja and Vithkuqi in Korça region in south-east Albania.

These churches are unusual in that they were built under the Muslim Ottoman regime by Christians living in an isolated rural area which at the time was highly populated and prosperous. The populations of Voskopoja and Vithkuqi reputedly exceeded 25000 but now are only about 1000 and 1500 respectively. In Voskopoja 25 churches existed while now only seven remain and Vithkuqi was similar with only five churches now left. The churches were required to be unobtrusive so as to be accepted by the Muslim authorities but this was compensated by the interiors which were covered with splendid murals. Trading and cultural links with Venice and Italy were strong and this greatly influenced the frescos and their design. The churches were attacked and badly damaged in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Since then earthquakes and subsequent war damage in both World Wars has resulted in the destruction of most of the churches and the very poor condition of the twelve remaining churches.

In recent years, the Ministry of Culture has started to restore these churches which are classified “Monuments of Culture”. The churches are nominally owned by the Albanian Orthodox Church but their legal status regarding ownership is still unclear. Tourism is an important and growing industry in Albania and cultural heritage is considered a potentially interesting attraction. Regional development in this isolated area is also being supported and these themes together are likely to attract external funding from the EU and other sources and this opportunity needs to be seized.

Restoration work has been carried out on most of the churches more actively since 2017 by the Institute of Cultural Monuments (ICM) through its Regional Directorate of Cultural Heritage (RDCH) in Korça. This initial work has concentrated on the protection of the buildings (roof repairs) and the structural stability but more work is still required. Most of the future work (>70%) is on cleaning, preserving and restoring the frescos, a specialist activity, and also on ensuring proper lighting and security.

A clear definition of the overall restoration works is not yet available. The object would be to bring selected churches back into religious use and to restore them all to preserve their heritage and to create interesting and worthwhile tourist destinations. Based on data from RDCH an action programme has been proposed, with preliminary cost estimates. Until now works seem to have been carried out when funds have become available and no long-term financing strategy or programme has been evident. The works have been carried out either by direct labour from RDCH or by contractors. This situation may soon change as external funding from the EU (ISPA 17) and the “100 villages” programme may become available and to attract such funds the projects must be well prepared, defined and justified and this is the challenge addressed in this report.

The overall project for the twelve churches is estimated to cost about € 4.3 M. These estimates are preliminary and will need confirming when more details of the actual works will become available. Two alternatives have been costed, namely a Priority Phase of three churches costing €1.4 M and a programme of all the Voskopoja churches at € 2.5 M. It is proposed to undertake an Initial Study to give a strategic overall view to orient the programme and this would be followed by a Preparatory Phase with more detailed surveys of the churches to define more clearly the detail work required and to finalise priorities before launching the project.

Some concerns have been noted in the report. The most significant with recommendations are summarised below:

- Lack of a long-term strategy requires an overall assessment of needs and the establishment of an overall programme, fully considering all relevant aspects.
- Greater cooperation with other parties, notably the Albanian Orthodox Church and the local population, should be established. A Coordination Committee is recommended and more public consultations arranged as appropriate.
- Some technical inadequacies have been noted and greater attention to contractor selection and particularly stronger specifications and enhanced contract/site supervision are recommended.
- The main activity will be restoring the frescos and additional resources will be necessary to achieve this in a reasonable time period. Skill enhancement is recommended with advice and support from external specialists.
- Attention drawn to ensuring proper maintenance post restoration.
- Parallel efforts on providing infrastructure, better access and services, and on improving the tourism offer are essential if the project is to be successful in the long term.

### **In conclusion:**

**These churches are exceptional by their history and form and contain very remarkable works of art which merit to be restored as cultural heritage and for the potential tourism benefits to this undeveloped region. An opportunity to fund such works more extensively than before may be available through the EU, the EBRD and other sources. This new opportunity should be taken by ensuring that a sound dossier and programme are prepared and various improvements in resourcing, quality and coordination are adopted as recommended in the report.**

## **2. Purpose, location**

The restoration of twelve religious buildings, comprising ten churches and two monasteries, the earliest dating from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century and most dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The buildings are located in or close to the administrative areas of the villages of Voskopoja and Vithkuqi in the Korça region of south-east Albania.

## **3. Context**

Most of central Albania is rural and relatively isolated, traditionally depending much on agriculture. It is mountainous in parts with peaks over 2000 m high and thickly forested in some areas but much of the forest cover has been depleted over the years. Roads have improved recently on the main links between the major towns but this is not the case between villages where many roads are still not all-weather (asphalted), creating major problems particularly in the severe winters.

In more detail, the Korça region has a population of 220,000 being 8% of the total population of Albania. Some 60% are classified as living in rural areas compared to 46% in the country as a whole. The Albanian population is declining with projections provided by the Albanian Statistical Office showing that by 2030 it will have reduced by 4%. This declining trend is general in the whole country with the exception of the area of Durres and the capital Tirana.

Korça has an estimated 14,000 enterprises with economic activity and half of them are dedicated to agriculture, forestry & fishing. Other economic sectors are relatively smaller than the national average showing optimistically some potential for growth. The number of enterprises dedicated to construction and accommodation/food services represents 1% and 9% respectively only of the total, this being less than the national average (3% and 13% respectively). This confirms the rural features of the area and the potential growth of industries that promote the diversification of the regional economy. The implementation of this project could foster, in a limited way, the development of a specialised construction activity; for success, this would require the public administration to support it with appropriate training and other measures.

Albania was under Ottoman rule from the 15<sup>th</sup> century until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite being predominantly a Muslim state during that period, there was a relatively tolerant attitude to other religions including Christianity which allowed it to be practised in certain regions; an example being in the Korça region around the villages of Voskopoja and Vithkuqi. This “project” area was a pocket of Christianity which continues to this day.

The small villages of Voskopoja and Vithkuqi, with current populations of 1000 and 1500 respectively, were thriving towns in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries with populations each reportedly exceeding 25,000. The towns traded in wool and other valuable produce particularly with Venice and Italy and were not far from an important east-west trade link, the Via Egnatia. It was at this time of prosperity that numerous churches were constructed, reputedly 24 in Voskopoja alone. These churches were built so as

not to offend the Ottoman overlords and so were conceived to be low rise and inconspicuous. This discreet approach to undemonstrative exteriors, combined with access to the Venetian artistic influence and the availability of a strong local talent, resulted in the blossoming of mural paintings and icons inside the churches. These were exceptional works comparable with any in the wider Balkan region.

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Christian community became threatened and most of the churches and monasteries were plundered and destroyed. More recently in 1967 all religions were banned in Albania and many churches were destroyed; this state was only reversed after 1985. Despite this difficult history the Christian tradition persists in the region but the only remnants of this splendid past in terms of buildings are the twelve religious buildings of the project which have been in very poor condition. The buildings have all been designated as “Monuments of Culture”, some as early as 1948 but most more recently, and this recognition should provide some protected status.

In recent years, efforts have been made by the Authorities to start restoration work on these buildings in recognition of their potential cultural and touristic significance. This restoration effort has become more active since 2017. Many of the churches have had basic work carried out in priority to protect the interiors with roof repairs and to ensure basic structural integrity and stability. An exceptional case is St. George’s church at Shipcka, which has been mainly but not yet completely restored with private funds and under the control of Dr Kallamata; this restoration was given a Europa Nostra Award in 2011.

It should be noted that the submission of the project to the “7 Most Endangered” programme was made in June 2017 on the basis of the situation in early 2017 when it was unclear what activities were planned by the Authorities; for this reason, it may have presented an over-pessimistic view of the situation as some work had already started in late 2016.

Tourism is a very important industry in Albania with revenues in 2017 representing 15% of GDP and this proportion continues to increase. The attractions are the fine countryside, mainly on the coast but also in the interior, and the exceptional cultural heritage absorbed from ancient Greece, Rome and the Ottomans. Most visitors are interested to visit the coastal resorts. Strategic plans have been drawn up to identify, develop and upgrade this potential also elsewhere. Improvements are needed in transport and other infrastructure as well as the tourism offer in general, all of which are deficient. The churches of the project are an attraction for enthusiastic specialists but with further restoration as proposed this interest should be considerably enhanced and thus they could become an attraction in their own right.

#### **4. Description**

The project is to restore the ten churches and the two monasteries in the Voskopoja / Vithkuqi region to the greatest extent practicable. This will generally consist of securing the existing structures to meet modern standards, and to providing modern lighting, heating and security systems. Also, in particular to restore the mural paintings

(frescos), furnishings and fittings (e.g. iconostasis) according to best practice and techniques so as to preserve their authenticity.

These activities will need proper planning and preparation to define the actual works to be undertaken and their optimal phasing. Much more detailed data on the actual needs and resources are required before defining the works and only a tentative outline will be presented in this report to illustrate the possibilities and to start the process.

The full restoration of these twelve religious buildings is summarised in more detail in appendix 2 which gives the status of the sites, the recently completed works and the future works still to be undertaken. It also notes which schemes have been approved and some which are being actively prepared. This is a preliminary analysis and needs to be firmed up with time.

The complete programme of works which should be implemented for the twelve buildings according to present information is summarised below:

1. Church of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, Voskopoja.

Structural studies and repairs to walls and roof. Restore frescos.

2. Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, Voskopoja.

Some structural work. Restore frescos. Interior work. Electric supply, lighting, alarm system.

3. Church of St. Nicholas, Voskopoja.

Restore frescos. Interior work. Electric supply, lighting, alarm system.

4. Church of St. Athanasius, Voskopoja.

Some structural work. Floors. Restore frescos. Electric supply, lighting, alarm system.

5. Church of St. George, Shipcka.

Consolidation of wall. Restore frescos.

6. Church of Monastery of Apostles Peter and Paul, and chapel, Vithkuqi.

Some structural work. Restore frescos. Chapel, full structural & fresco restoration.

7. Church of the Archangels Gabriel and Michael, Vithkuqi.

Structural review and repairs. Humidity problem. Restore frescos.

8. Church of the Prophet Elijah, Voskopoja.

Walls cleaned, re-plastered (no frescos). New gate entrance, electric supply, lighting, alarm system.

9. Church of St. George, Vithkuqi.

Electric supply, lighting, alarm system.

10. Church of the Monastery St. John the Forerunner (Prodromios), Voskopoja.

Roof structure, interiors, restore frescos (major work), west wing rebuild.

11. Church of St. Mary, Vithkuqi.

Windows replaced, restore plaster/frescos. Drainage. Electric power, lighting, alarm system.

12. Church of the Holy Trinity, Lavdar.

Studies required (Master thesis). Full restoration of structure, frescos, equipment.

It is unlikely that all these works can be undertaken in a single phase due to constraints on work and skills capacity as well as financial resources so several phases may be necessary.

A First Phase is proposed to focus attention on the highest priority (which may be modified following further studies). In addition an alternative scenario is presented which adopts the current conditions of the “100 villages” programme, where investments are restricted to Voskopoja.

The outline programme of restoration could comprise:

- An Initial Study Phase covering all the churches to define in more detail the overall work to be done and to firm up priorities. It should also identify any urgent protection works needed to prevent serious damage in the immediate future. The study should also consider and report on the historical and architectural significance of the churches. After this initial phase, which allows the overall strategy to be decided upon, a more detailed Preparation Phase should be undertaken. This phase would include a detailed digitalised survey of the churches selected which could be used later in structural repair works and for the fresco restorations as appropriate. The Preparation Study would form the technical basis for the works contracts and the restoration works.
- Phase 1 of the works to comprise the full restoration of the two active churches St. Nicolas in Voskopoja and the Archangels Gabriel and Michael in Vithkuqi and the church St. Athanasius which is active with its cemetery. Urgent repairs or protection works needed for other churches should be included as identified in the initial study phase.
- Further Phases, say two, could follow depending on the conclusions of the initial study and circumstances (e.g. availability of finance).
- As mentioned above, a “Voskopoja project” of the seven churches located there could be presented for the “100 villages” initiative. Note that Shipcka church is included in this being part of the Voskopoja Administrative unit.
- The works being planned by the RDCH for 2019 could continue in parallel to the above so as to avoid wasted efforts. These include some relatively minor actions on the Voskopoja churches of the Dormition and the Archangels.

## **5. Technical aspects**

### Specific nature of the works and paintings.

Most of the buildings are some 250 years old and have not been significantly modified since their original and often phased construction, with narthexes, porticos and bell towers being added a few years later. Most churches have had parts seriously damaged and these parts have often been abandoned. The designs are termed *post* Byzantine being built under the Orthodox religious architectural and religious tradition during the Ottoman domination. The churches are mostly basilicas with a principal nave, set in a rectangular form and generally being low rise. They are positioned so as not to be too conspicuous, responding to the ruling Ottoman Muslim regime at the time. Most roofs

are simple with the interior domes being hidden, but some have more ornate cupolas. In some cases, a modest bell tower has been added, often built separately.

The special feature of these churches is their interior decoration. These interiors are richly and extensively decorated with mural paintings generally using the “*a fresco*” technique. Despite neglect and the negative actions of man and nature over the years, these interiors have managed to survive in reasonable condition and so are able to be cleaned and restored to give a wonderful presentation of their past splendour. Particular attention is drawn to two churches which have special frescos by renowned artists (David Selenicasi at St. Nicolas, and the Zografi brothers at St. Athanasius). There is no similar contemporary high-quality fresco work in such a concentration in the wider Balkans Region preserved to this extent, with the possible exception of Mount Athos. In addition to the mural paintings, icons and wooden carvings and furniture have also been recovered and have been or need to be restored. The iconostasis and icons were particularly fine and some are exhibited in the newly opened National Museum of Medieval Art in Korça.

The restoration and preservation of frescos is a very specialised art and these particular examples are of such merit that every effort should be made to restore them using the latest technology and expertise. Some concerns following the short visit were expressed on the programming and the approach to the restoration of the frescos. A more detailed review is presented in Appendix 3 by Dr. Paolo Vitti. It is recommended that advice and support is sought from outside experts such as based at the Byzantine Centre in Thessaloniki.

These old buildings have a history and when any major work is undertaken on them due attention needs to be paid to ensuring that time and effort is reserved for any archaeological work and studies that are deemed necessary by the experts.

### Structural problems.

Typically, the churches comprise a nave bounded by high walls with limited windows. The nave may be split into three sections by columns combined with arches and interspersed by internal domes. Often beside the nave is an external portico usually on the south side. The porticos are often later additions as are the narthexes situated at the west end. The walls are of masonry from local stone with lime mortar. Foundations are probably simple strip foundations under the walls and isolated pads under the columns. The roofs cover the internal domes, vaults and arches with timber frames supporting stone slabs placed irregularly. In some cases, the domes pierce the plane roof shape resulting in humps in the external shape of the roof.

The main problems of structural stability arise from external actions such as earthquakes and war damage. Lack of care and maintenance over the years has contributed to these problems as has the age of the buildings. It would seem in some cases that wall tilting, probably due to excessive roof loads, has resulted in longitudinal cracks in the crown of the vaults or cracks around the domes. In some instances, foundation settlement may have contributed to problems, notably in the internal



columns. Temperature and humidity may have induced further cracking. Wall and arch ties are common to increase stability and have been usually retrofitted. Some ties are of timber but more recently steel bars have been proposed, which provide additional strength and are less invasive with more secure anchorage.

The seismic risk is classified as “high” as Albania is situated at the interface of major tectonic plates; the most active area is along the coastline with a major fault system but a further north-south fault lies through the Korça region. Major earthquakes occurred in 1960 and 1967 which significantly damaged the churches. Earthquakes have often damaged the less robust porticos as many were not firmly connected to the adjacent shear walls of the naves.

To restore the churches, it is essential to carry out a detailed examination of the structure so as to understand its construction history and to log any deformations and cracks indicating distress. Monitoring may be required over a period to check any movements. An holistic approach is essential, looking at the whole context and structure together and to ensure that this is done by experienced professionals. The training course organised by the Institute of Cultural Monuments together with UNESCO on 2017, entitled “Structural analysis, reinforcement methods and techniques of historical masonry buildings” was an excellent initiative and focussed on some of the project’s churches. It outlined methodologies for structural assessment, which generally include testing and some computerised models. Similar initiatives are to be encouraged to help educate and enthuse participants, who were mainly ICM staff members.

On the short visit to some of the churches, it was noted that problems had occurred during recent restoration work as described below:

- The roof of St. Nicolas (Voskopoja) was rebuilt in 2017 but shortly afterwards serious leakage from rainfall occurred down one wall and at points in the nave. The wall leakage may have damaged some mural paintings. The contractor was required to carry out repairs and these have been tested but will need to be confirmed this coming winter (2018/19). Poor quality work may regrettably occur but this would indicate either lack of competence of the contractor or inadequate supervision of the works or both and these weaknesses should be addressed.
- The church of the Archangels (Voskopoja) suffered serious flooding (1m deep water inside the church) following a storm. According to reports it appears that work on the adjacent roadway (carried out under the same contract as the restoration works in the church, but by a different contractor) had blocked off the previous drainage system resulting in the flooding. Lack of coordination between the works on the road and the church and inadequate attention to the road design seem to have been the cause. Thus a problem of contract / site management and poor overall coordinated supervision.
- The church of the Archangels (Vithkuqi) has recently been re-roofed. After this, it was noticed that serious cracking existed along the crown of the vault and associated cracking in the west wall. It is unclear whether the cracks existed

before the roof rebuild or as a result of this work. The cause is also unclear, whether it was foundation induced or wall instability. Another possibility might be recent seismic activity but this was not noted at the time.

Clearly it is regrettable that these cracks were not noticed beforehand (if they existed then) so that coherent optimal repairs and restoration could take place. Alternatively, if the cracks were induced by the rebuilding of the roof (which seems unlikely) then something was being seriously mishandled. A detailed survey and a monitoring programme are now required to address the problem.

- In the same church of the Archangels (Vithkuqi) the portico has been restored and repointed with cement mortar rather than lime mortar. Cement mortar is incompatible with old stone and bricks and will result in serious cracking in time. This is a rather basic restoration error which should be avoided by clearer specification and more vigilant site supervision in the future.

### Damp / humidity control.

Controlling the water ingress is a continuous challenge and this is particularly critical when mural paintings are concerned. The roof is the principal protector against rainfall and its design and construction and maintenance are critical for success. Dampness seeps up and through the walls unless there is a positive barrier and often this does not exist, reliance being placed on well pointed stonework and good ventilation. In churches which are not often used these problems are likely to pass unnoticed, compounding the risks and problems. Heating systems were traditionally by wood burning stoves but these point-heat sources should be complemented by good air circulation and ventilation to be effective; poor natural ventilation results from the very closed design with the small and high windows. Regular inspection would help. A special study could be useful to address the problem of ventilation as it occurs often.

### Access, security.

A general problem with all churches is that they often house valuable assets and the Church Authorities would like them ideally to be permanently open and available to the public. This creates a security risk and several cases of robbery have taken place over time and also even recently. A particular shocking instance was when the recently restored iconostasis of St. George's church in Shipcka was stolen; apparently the substantial wooden carved framework and associated paintings were taken in three different heists and have since disappeared. Security poses a greater problem when churches are unmanned as most are here due to the shortage of clergy. Only two of the churches are active with services every week (St. Nicolas in Voskopoja and the Archangels in Vithkuqi) but even these do not have a permanent presence. Reliance for security, at least passively, falls on RDCH employees living close by acting as key holders whose main responsibility is to allow access rather than to be active security guards.

It is important to encourage the local population to associate themselves with the churches and the restoration activities; this is not only sound and good neighbourhood

practice but also would contribute to help to protect the buildings from vandals and thieves. Greater efforts to engage with the local population is recommended.

Alarm systems are proposed in several of the churches. These alarm systems require electrical power (or some battery / solar panel system) and this is also needed for the important internal and external lighting systems. In some locations, away from the electricity network, the electrical supply may be difficult and expensive to install.

#### Resources – skills, materials.

Restoring, preserving and rebuilding heritage buildings (and churches in particular) are specialist activities. They require committed and competent personnel at all stages of the processes, be they to maintain the buildings, to assess the technical issues, to decide and define and specify the works needed or actually to undertake the works. This experience is built up over years of activity and needs nurturing.

In the case of these churches, while some activity has taken place over the years, only recently has this become more intensive with notable action since 2017 and experience is still being gained. The RDCH has a small unit of some 20 persons in Korça comprising four architects, one engineer, three restorers, two administrators and 10 site workers. They are mainly involved in maintenance and emergency work and the site supervision covering all the cultural monuments in the Region, not only for these churches. The RDCH Korça is responsible for 168 monuments and can undertake fewer than about ten significant actions each year. Human and financial resources are clearly limited. Overall supervision and support are provided from ICM in Tirana where a more significant technical department exists, mainly involved in the more major restoration works.

A recent change in the law allows ICM to use external consultants to prepare contracts and supervise the works. This is a big advance allowing specialist consultants to contribute in more complex schemes and it would help to supplement the slim resources of the local ICM in manpower and expertise.

Contractors undertaking the works are required to be on the National Register as competent for this type of construction. There are a limited number of such firms in the Korça region and this may result in a lack of real competition. Opening bids to qualified international experienced contractors (perhaps in joint ventures) could also represent a chance for local capacity building. Vigilance on the choice of contractors within the legal procedures is important and concern about competence must be compensated by increased and firm contract management and site supervision, probably by using external consultants more extensively.

It is to be noted that the Church has a small technical department comprising architects and engineers. Their role is mainly on maintenance but they have contributed to some more substantial work for example on the Archangels church in Voskopoja. The Church considers it is not adequately consulted about the restoration programme in which it has a very real interest (being nominally the owner and the operator).

## Tourism

This is a key sector for development in Albania and it currently represents over 15% GDP and is growing significantly (+13% last year). Many studies and planning are in hand and the strategy is to upgrade the tourism offer to encourage higher spenders through promoting themes such as cultural and historical heritage. The objective is to diversify the sector, currently concentrated on coastal tourism, and to lengthen the season which is limited by weather. Most visitors are from neighbouring countries such as Kosovo, Macedonia and Greece.

Tourism cannot operate in isolation and good cooperation between the key ministries is essential, notably being those involved in Regional Development, Transport and Culture.

Particular emphasis to encourage tourism in the interior is placed on the “100 villages” programme under the Ministry of Regional Development. Also relevant to this church restoration project is an initiative by the Ministry of Culture to organise “Routes of Faith” to encourage visitors to explore off the beaten track. In addition, the Ministry of Culture has a decentralised network of museums across Albania and, as has been noted elsewhere, Korça has the most extensive Icon exhibition centre in the country housed in the National Museum of Medieval Art.

The information provided by the different sources does not allow an accurate estimate of the importance of tourism to the Korça region. However, it seems currently to be lower than in the rest of Albania if the number of restaurants and accommodation units is taken as a proxy. Quality tourism must have a solid infrastructure supported by private initiatives and cannot rely only on the public sector.

In Albania about 25% of the 5 million tourists in 2017 came in August, mainly to the coastal resorts, which puts much pressure on these areas. Widening the tourist offer elsewhere, to say Korça and its heritage sites, could help to extend the season and spread the benefits, reducing the imbalance. The Korça area has good potential with its cultural heritage and leisure activities due to its proximity to the main lakes and to its beautiful surroundings.

## **6. Implementation**

### 6.1 Responsibilities.

#### Historical Owner:

Metropolis Church of Korça, Voskopoja and Vithkuqi of the Albanian Orthodox Church.

The churches in Albania were all seized by the State during the Communist era (post 1945) and many were destroyed in 1967 when religious institutions were formally banned. The status has been nominally reversed by a law passed in 2008 which ceded back property to the Church. This law has still not been executed so there is a legal limbo on formal ownership of the churches.

### Administrative Authority:

The Ministry of Culture has overall responsibility for the upkeep and good state of the national monuments. The activity is delegated within the Ministry to the Institute of Cultural Monuments (ICM) for overall administrative responsibility and the local activities are carried out by the Regional Directorate of Korça (RDCH). Approvals for works are the responsibility of the National Council of Restoration (NCR).

Good coordination between all these bodies is important. According to the Church authorities, it seems to be “informed” afterwards rather than “consulted” beforehand by the ICM about the works and actions to be undertaken and this state needs to be improved for the benefit of both parties.

### 6.2 Planning and programme.

The ICM takes the lead in planning and programming the works. This is not by any means its only activity or its highest priority as it has many other responsibilities. The role of the Church in planning actions on the churches seems secondary which is surprising as they are the putative owners of the assets and are the guardians of the culture expressed there. The Church’s views on priorities of repairs / restoration and in some cases the manner in which the restoration works is carried out should be considered as an integral part of the planning process.

A surge of action took place in 2017, activated by a growing appreciation of the importance of these monuments for attracting tourism as well as the long-term interest in retaining the rather special cultural heritage. Availability of suitable (grant) funds will control any progress and the restoration works seem to be planned around this availability on an inevitably short-term basis.

This constraint on finance and the consequent short-term approach may be the reason that no long-term or strategic programme of works has been made available from ICM. With the possibility of significant external funding, a more structured and rational long-term programme needs to be proposed to attract these funds.

A conceptual programme, in line with the Phase 1 presented under §4 Description, could be as follows:

- Draw up the terms of reference for the two study stages, namely the Initial Study Phase and the Preparatory Phase.
- Award these contracts preferably to the same organisation, ensuring its capacity to undertake the study works and the surveys (which may need to be subcontracted but under the consultant’s control).
- After the Initial Study Phase, covering all the churches, is completed the Authorities should make the strategic decisions on how the project is to proceed. At this stage the project should be ready to apply for external funds and an appropriate sound dossier should be a principal output of the study.

- The Preparatory Phase should be done on the selected churches as decided in the strategy. This phase would include appropriate digital surveys to be used to help define the detailed structural repairs and fresco restorations to be undertaken. It would also complete the other relevant studies necessary prior to the tender phase.
- Project and contract supervisor(s) to be selected, if different consultants are to be used than for the Studies Phase.
- Contract documents finalised, with special attention to the technical specifications. The works and the restoration works would be put out to tender or carried out by internal specialists as appropriate.
- Contracts awarded or works committed and works would then proceed.

A tentative and indicative programme, to be refined later when more data is available, could be as follows, assuming the project starts early 2019:

|                             |               |
|-----------------------------|---------------|
| Award Study contracts:      | February 2019 |
| Complete Initial Study:     | May 2019      |
| Main decision on content:   | June 2019     |
| Complete Preparatory Study: | October 2019  |

Main works contracts say 18 months from January 2020 to June 2021.

If the “Voskopoja” project or the full programme were adopted the timing should be adapted appropriately and would certainly need to be extended.

As mentioned earlier, some form of structured consultation with the Church and other interested parties such as the local population and local NGOs would be useful, for instance through a formal Consultative Committee. Also, improved public information through meetings to discuss ideas would merit attention; bringing the local population into the process would reduce concerns and enhance their engagement, for instance having the effect of improving the security of the sites.

## **7. Procurement**

Albania is not part of the EU and so the EU procurement procedures do not legally apply, although as a potential member Albanian practices are becoming aligned with the EU procedures. In any event for the sake of sound practice and to obtain the optimal result, the EU procedures should be taken as guidelines for action. These procedures require that all construction work contracts exceeding € 5.5 M in value and services contracts exceeding €145 000 in value should be put out to formal international tender. These limits are unlikely to be reached in the case of this project as the nature and scale of contracts are likely to be much smaller.

Nevertheless, it is to be recommended that local tendering, with at least three valid bidders, should be carried out to obtain competitive and transparent results. Likewise,

for consultancy work of any substance, a consultation comprising at least three valid proposals should be obtained, with encouragement to international expertise. Transparent and well documented procedures should be used.

The contract strategy and how the contracts are to be packaged and awarded are important to the success of the actions. These depend to some extent on local capacities and the need to enhance these. Conscious decisions must be made on this strategy by the Authorities responsible

## **8. Environment, sustainability, social**

The area around these two villages is mountainous and rural with rather depleted forests. The roads are in poor condition, many being tracks almost impassable in winter. A gas pipeline is being laid through the area and as a result some of the infrastructure is being upgraded. The churches are rather discreet as already mentioned and so are well integrated into the countryside. The churches generally use local resources and the scale of works for the restorations is limited. Any construction activity should abide by local requirements on the environment with regard to nuisance and disposal of material. In sum, there do not appear to be major concerns environmentally linked to the restoration activities likely to be proposed.

A continuing concern is to ensure that once restored the churches and their contents are properly maintained so that they can continue to operate in good sustainable condition. Arrangements for this should be put in place (see under §10).

Renovating and restoring churches for the use and benefit of the local community is in itself important socially, particularly in isolated communities. Proposals to engage the local community more with the restoration work (see under §6.2) will help to consolidate these social impacts.

Tourism must be well managed to ensure the benefits are maximised and the disadvantages are limited. The negative risks here are not high however and civilised well behaved tourists should be welcome.

## **9. Use, market, demand**

The population in the Voskopoja Administrative Unit (of five villages) is about 1000 residents and about half are Christian. In the Vithkuqi Administrative Unit (of 10 villages) there are 1500 residents, almost all being Christian. One church (§12 Lavdar) is outside these units but close by. There are no resident clergy in the villages but clergy come from Korça to take the services. The Church, as elsewhere, is in a rather difficult situation lacking adequate numbers of active clergy and is short of available funds. It is reported that Church support is slowly increasing, aided by the return of previous emigrants, notably from Greece.

The churches are in poor condition and only two are regularly used (St. Nicolas in Voskopoja and Archangels Michael and Gabriel in Vithkuqi). Other churches where special saints days are celebrated are the Monastery of St. John the Forerunner

(Voskopoja), St. Peter and Paul (Vithkuqi) and St. George (Shipcka). St Athanasius has a cemetery which is used.

Apart from the important primary activity of catering for local and visiting Christians, the churches have an architectural and historical heritage interest and this has already attracted some visitors, particularly specialist foreign tourists. However, the region is relatively remote and not easy to visit, the main attraction for visitors being the mountainous and wild countryside. Reliable data on visitors to the region and particularly to the sites of the churches is rather limited. While the tourism potential is being recognised and a priority being put on the sector by the Authorities for the future prosperity of Albania, the current actions are concentrating more on strategic studies and not yet on concrete proposals and hopefully this will develop in the future.

In these circumstances it is not realistic to estimate possible demand in terms of visitors and revenue generation. It is probable that if restored the tourism potential would certainly rise and could help to justify part of the expenditure. In addition, the impact on the local community and the cultural and historical benefits would be significant. The churches and their splendid frescos may be considered of interest on a European scale and so there is a cultural responsibility to restore and preserve them.

It is noted that tourists are informed about the churches by simple but well-designed didactic panels outside most churches. This should be extended to all churches and in due course complemented by suitable publications. Further developing the existing websites could encourage understanding and interest. Information on the history of these two special villages would also be of interest to tourists.

In conclusion, for the relatively small cost of restoring many of these churches, the benefits could be significant even though mainly intangible. Parallel improvements in the tourism offer, in terms of improved access, more and better accommodation and enhanced information on the area and the specific sites, are essential.

## **10. Operation and maintenance**

The churches are looked after by the nominal owner, the Church, which controls the religious activities. It also has a nominal responsibility for the routine maintenance and upkeep of the churches, which is important and the key to ensuring that the restored buildings remain in good condition. The main responsibility for the maintenance of these cultural monuments rests with the ICM. Over many years a lack of care has contributed to the present degraded state of the buildings. The climate is severe and care and sensible precautions should be taken to avoid sudden temperature changes inside the churches.

Operating costs may increase with the installation of electric lighting and alarm systems and this needs to be recognised in budgeting. A substantial increase in visitors would entail some costs in supervising the sites more regularly and in such trivial activities as litter collection.

The respective roles of the Church and the ICM for responsibility for the churches' maintenance needs to be clarified and agreed between the parties. This should cover



daily upkeep and cleaning, annual maintenance and long-term repairs and heavy maintenance work. Funds and resources need to be allocated to these activities to ensure the buildings and their surrounds are kept in good condition after the restoration works are completed.

Currently, the Ministry of Culture does not charge for visits to the churches. Costs are low limited to the services of the key holders. Consideration should be given to enhancing the professionalism of guides and the possibility of charging to help offset operation and maintenance costs. This would certainly be recommended for the restored churches.

## 11. Investment cost

The cost of the restoration works is difficult to estimate as past works have often been carried out under different working regimes. Works done by external contractors are easier to interpret and these are often based on the Administration's schedule of costs. Often the work has been carried out by the RDCH using own labour with costs for materials only being counted. In other cases, volunteers and the Church have worked on a marginal or effectively free basis. The resulting costs at present seem rather low by comparison with other European Countries. Some basic and very simplistic unit costs have been used to get an overall idea of the scale of the costs involved and these will need to be refined at a later stage. It is assumed in these estimates that contractors will be used throughout. Reasonable contingencies and assumptions have been made. Further details on costs are given in Appendix 2.

It is stressed again these are very indicative estimates at this stage to fix ideas of scale.

Cost Estimate in € (2018 values)

(assuming 1€ = 125 ALL).

|                                       | All churches     | Priority<br>Phase 1 | Voskopoja only   |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Initial Study Phase:                  | 40 000           | 40 000              | 40 000           |
| <u>Preparation Phase (20% wks.) :</u> | <u>600 000</u>   | <u>180 000</u>      | <u>420 000</u>   |
| Roof, structure                       | 675 000          | 115 000             | 470 000          |
| Frescos                               | 2 240 000        | 775 000             | 1 600 000        |
| Miscellaneous                         | 50 000           | 12 000              | 30 000           |
| <u>Sub-total works</u>                | <u>2 965 000</u> | <u>902 000</u>      | <u>2 100 000</u> |
| Design / supervision (8% wks.)        | 240 000          | 72 000              | 170 000          |
| Contingencies (15% wks.)              | 445 000          | 136 000             | 315 000          |
| Total                                 | 4 280 000        | 1 330 000           | 3 045 000        |
| <b>Rounded</b>                        | <b>4 300 000</b> | <b>1 400 000</b>    | <b>3 100 000</b> |

Timing of needs € (optimistic view).

|      |           |         |           |
|------|-----------|---------|-----------|
| 2019 | 640 000   | 220 000 | 460 000   |
| 2020 | 1 200 000 | 580 000 | 800 000   |
| 2021 | 1 500 000 | 600 000 | 1 040 000 |
| 2022 | 1 200 000 |         | 800 000   |

## **12. Financing possibilities**

In the past the funds for the restoration of the churches have come principally from the Ministry of Culture either directly to contractors or indirectly through the activities of the RDCH in Korça. Other sources have been private donations, some significant such as for St. George's church in Shipcka.

The Ministry of Tourism is becoming more active in promoting the region and its tourist potential and this means amongst other actions that this could extend to include the restoration of the churches. Regional development is another driver of investment relating to the construction activities and skills enhancement as well as its key role of supporting and benefitting from tourism.

The Government, conscious of the plight of the rural economy, has launched an initiative entitled the "100 villages programme". The idea is to promote an integrated cross sectorial approach to selected villages in order to improve the infrastructure, promote regional development through diverse actions and to support the local administration. Voskopoja is one of the villages selected, but Vithkuqi has not been included (so far). The programme would be for 3 years from 2018/19. Funding is still being sought and discussions are in hand. It is understood significant funds could be allocated to each village (of the order of €5 m) and also that a local contribution of 50% may be required, which might complicate matters.

Another potential funding source is the EU through its IPA II programme mainly aimed at tourism development. The IPA 17 programme, which is still not finally agreed, focusses on tourism and regional development. The Korça region is identified as a key recipient. An EU grant of € 60 M could be combined with a € 60 M loan from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) through the Albanian Development Bank which would then on-lent as a grant to the ultimate recipients. The procedures and selection of potential projects are not yet agreed. The IPA 18 programme of EU grants is of much smaller scale and is still under discussion.

The important point for the churches is that if such international funding were to be attracted to the project, the project must be properly prepared and be credible as an investment. A sound proposal with clear definition, programme, costing and procedures for the project's execution is essential. This is important for the good progress of the programme in any event.

The IPA funds solely depend on the Managing Authority which in Albania is the Ministry of European Integration. The Ministry of Culture must put forward a request for funds to this Managing Authority, together with a supporting dossier.

A strategy for the development of the restoration programme of the churches needs to be set up in a form to match the funding possibilities, as tentatively suggested below:

|   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| “100 villages” programme for Voskopoja: | max. 1.50 M € (50% of 3 M €) |
| IPA II Funding:                         | 2.30 M €                     |
| Other private Funding:                  | 0.50 M €                     |

### **13. Conclusion: Proposed actions and recommendations**

The monuments identified in the project are unusual and rather unique buildings with historical relevance, religious significance and high artistic value. They are potentially an important tourist attraction and could assist regional development with positive impacts on employment. This potential is now being recognised after years of neglect and action is now needed to capitalise on it.

In recent years efforts have been made by the various Government Authorities responsible for Culture, Regional Development and Tourism to incorporate historical monuments such as these churches into their programmes. The Ministry of Culture has been particularly involved in starting to restore these monuments in the Korça region through its local Regional Department of Cultural Heritage, part of the Institute of Cultural Heritage based in Tirana.

Most of the twelve buildings of the project have had some essential protective restoration undertaken recently. Funding and resources have been limited and the works carried out seem to have been fitted in as the resources became available rather than forming part of a structured long-term programme. Nevertheless, the works seem to have been done rationally with initial attention being paid to protection by repairing the roof structures and also to the main structural integrity of the buildings. Most of the destroyed buildings and badly damaged parts such as porticos and narthexes have not been rebuilt and this seems reasonable at this stage but it could be reviewed later.

This recent restoration work has been instructive in showing the potential benefits and has provided experience developing expertise in this specialised field of restoration of old dilapidated buildings. While much useful work has been undertaken not all has been to the high standard expected for these exceptional monuments. Several points of concern have been noted during the short visits and these are given in the text and the main points summarised below with recommendations:

- A strategic programme seems to be lacking. Attention should be placed on developing such a rational programme so as to obtain funds, and to plan and programme optimally. Such a Strategic Review and the establishment of an Overall Programme is proposed as a first action. The proposals presented in this report are indicative only and require much more detailed work than has been possible in the short time available for this mission.

- Such an Overall Programme should be practical and sufficiently flexible. It should involve discussions and cooperation with other interested parties to gain support. The Orthodox Church, the Korça Municipality, the local village representatives and local experts should be more actively engaged and encouraged to contribute, and greater efforts should be made in this respect. Some form of structured contacts, for example through a Coordination Committee under the aegis of the ICM, would be useful to improve decision making and involve locals more closely with the programme. Agreement is necessary on a maintenance programme after restoration.
- Some technical issues where inadequacies have occurred (e.g. church flooding, poor roof repairs, works programming - serious cracking while roof repairs underway) require review and improvement to avoid re-occurrence. Improved contractor selection, firmer specifications and much stronger site supervision are recommended. The recently permitted use of external consultants should be encouraged to help solve these issues.
- The restoration of the frescos is now the principal activity, representing >70% of the new work. The scale of work proposed is considerably greater than previously and will require additional resources as until now most fresco restoration has been carried out by the small dedicated team within RDCH. In addition, some skill enhancement for improving the restoration techniques is recommended as some weaknesses are perceived. Some form of training or structured workshops from external experts would be highly desirable, similar to that already carried out. Encouragement should be given to issuing scientific documentation with ideally open access to data for researchers.
- Particular efforts need to be made to ensure that funding through the various mechanisms available from the EU and EBRD are used to the benefit of the project. Sound preparation and presentation are important as well as the optimal timing of actions and decision making so as to achieve this.
- The project should be integrated into the Korça development strategy at the wider level. This should focus not only on the churches restoration but the economic impact of such restoration. The project can help to support the consolidation and expansion of labour-intensive economic sectors, such as small hotels/accommodation and construction, with positive impacts. These impacts should encourage support for better road access, infrastructure and tourism development in the Region.

#### **In conclusion:**

**These churches are exceptional by their history and form and contain very remarkable works of art which merit to be restored as cultural heritage as well as for the potential tourism benefits to this undeveloped region. An opportunity to fund such works is becoming available and this should be taken by ensuring that a sound dossier and programme are prepared and various improvements in resourcing, quality and coordination are adopted as recommended.**

## Mission details and references.

|                                    |                        |                   |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| <u>EN / EIB-Institute mission:</u> | Paolo Vitti            | EN Board Member   |
|                                    | Lourdes Llorens Abando | EIB-I Consultant  |
|                                    | Lida Miraj             | EN Council Member |
|                                    | Peter Bond             | EIB-I Consultant  |

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <u>Mission programme:</u> | 18 – 22 September 2018                                 |
|                           | 18.09.18 Ministry Tourism and Environment, Tirana      |
|                           | 19.09.18 Site visit to 8 churches, Voskopoja, Vithkuqi |
|                           | 20.09.18 Metropolitane of Korça                        |
|                           | 20.09.18 Mayor of Korça                                |
|                           | 21.09.18 Delegation of the European Union, Tirana      |
|                           | 21.09.18 Ministry of Culture, Tirana                   |

### Persons met:

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Past4Future:           | Kliti Kallamata, Managing Director (also project nominator)  |
| Ministry of Tourism:   | Evisi Koplaku, Director, Integration/Coordination  |
| Church, Korça:         | Joan Pelushi, the Metropolitane, the Bishop  |
| Mayor of Korça:        | Sotiraq Filo   |
| Delegation, EU Tirana: | Entela Sulka, Project officer  |
| Ministry of Culture:   | Mirela Kumbaro Furxhi, Minister<br>Teuta Malo, Director of Cabinet<br>Arta Dollani, Director of Institute of Cultural Monuments<br>Daniel Pirushi, Adviser to the Minister<br>Kozeta Angjeliu, Director Tangible Heritage, Museums |
| RDCH / ICM Korça:      | Edvis Koki, Director<br>Amanda Cici, Architect<br>Jani Zoica, Mural specialist   |

### References

- Nomination Form for the “7 Most Endangered” Dr Kliti Kallamata June 2017.
- Response to pre-mission Questionnaire. May 2018.
- Report “Restoration & Maintenance 2014-18” by RDCH, Korça. October 2018.

|  |
|--|
| <p><b>1. Church of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, Voskopoja</b>, built in 1696, painted in 1722.<br/>Domed and vaulted basilica. Not currently used. Protected area.<br/>Built area 480 m<sup>2</sup>, max. height 11.3 m, surrounding area 1920 m<sup>2</sup>.</p> <p><u>Recent restoration:</u> Roof repaired in 1999 &amp; 2014 but unsatisfactory.<br/>In 2018 further roof repairs in damaged areas. Cost 400 k ALL (3 k €), work by RDCH Korça.</p> <p><u>Current state:</u> Excess loading to arches a concern. Roof structure still in poor condition. Possible foundation problems. Serious flooding in 2017 in the nave (1 m depth) caused by inadequate drainage in new adjacent road.</p> <p><u>Future restoration:</u> Structural studies. Roof rebuild, probably foundation, wall and arch repairs (under preparation). Major work on fresco restoration.</p>   |
| <p><b>2. Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, Voskopoja</b>, built in 1699, painted in 1712. Domed and vaulted basilica. Not currently used. Was the principal church (cathedral) in Voskopoja. The narthex on western end and the southern portico have been destroyed by war and earthquake respectively. Protected area (2015).<br/>Present built area 423 m<sup>2</sup>, max. height 10.30 m, surrounding area 1400 m<sup>2</sup>.</p> <p><u>Recent restoration:</u> Complete roof structure and covering, porch, floor of nave and portico, exterior decoration of the apse, north wall exterior soil removed (2 m deep), drainage of foundations, external pathway, domes were waterproofed and re-covered with roof slabs. 2016-17. Cost 7.0 M ALL (56 k €), work by contractor. Fresco consolidation works. Small external fresco restored. 2014-16. Done by RDCH Korça.</p> <p><u>Current state:</u> Structure reasonably satisfactory. Humidity problems.</p> <p><u>Future restoration:</u> Further work to restore northern wall. Frescos major restoration needed (approved), also interior woodwork / furniture, electricity supply for internal &amp; external lighting (being prepared), alarm system required.</p> |
| <p><b>3. Church of St. Nicholas, Voskopoja</b>, built in 1722, painted in 1726 (nave) and 1750 (arcade).<br/>Domed and vaulted basilica. Regularly used as the main village church. Classified Cultural Monument 1<sup>st</sup> category.<br/>Built area 540 m<sup>2</sup>, max. height 11 m, surrounding area 930 m<sup>2</sup>.</p> <p><u>Recent restoration:</u> Roof fully restored, dome structures consolidated. Main walls partly consolidated. Floors repaired. Drainage improved. Portico restored. 2016-17. Cost 12.5 M ALL (100 k €), work by Contractor.<br/>Frescos consolidation work 2018. Done by RDCH Korça.</p> <p><u>Current state:</u> Roof recently re-repaired (leakages need checking). Structure now reasonably sound. Frescos in poor condition.</p> <p><u>Future works:</u> Main work restoration of frescos (approved), window restoration, interior woodwork and furniture. Electrical power supply, lighting and heating. Alarm system.</p>   |

|   |
|---|
| <p><b>4. Church of St. Athanasius, Voskopoja</b>, built in 1724, painted in 1744 (nave) and 1745 (portico). Domed and vaulted basilica. Not regularly used, but some activity linked to the cemetery. Protected area.<br/>Built area 340 m<sup>2</sup>, max. height 9.4 m, surrounding area 1420 m<sup>2</sup>.</p> <p><u>Recent restoration:</u> Southern portico, façade and roof. Surrounding walls (north &amp; west). 2017. Cost 300 k ALL (2.4 k €). Done by RDCH Korça. (Lighting system and minor roof maintenance work). Some fresco restoration (west nave). Done by RDCH Korça.</p> <p><u>Current state:</u> Fairly good state but roof suspect (leaks?), some cracking.</p> <p><u>Future restoration:</u> Pointing work around domes and walls (need further analysis), decoration of corbelling in portico, major work on the frescos, floor of nave. Electrical power supply for lighting. Alarm system.</p>              |
| <p><b>5. Church of St. George, Shipcka</b>, built in early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Painted in first half of 18th century. The village Shipcka is 6 km north-west of Voskopoja. Domed and vaulted basilica. Occasionally used. Protected area.<br/>Built area 328 m<sup>2</sup>.</p> <p><u>Recent restoration:</u> Major rebuild in 2004-7. Narthex rebuilt, north wall consolidated. Roof reconstructed. Frescos cleaned, some conservation. Cost 300 k € financed privately. Work by contractor, some volunteers. Partial consolidation of frescos 2018. Done by RDCH Korça.</p> <p><u>Current state:</u> Generally good condition. Further fresco restoration needed.</p> <p><u>Future restoration:</u> Consolidation of Eastern wall (programmed). Frescos to be restored (300 m<sup>2</sup>). Estimate 220 k €.</p>  |
| <p><b>6. Monastery of Apostles Peter and Paul, Vithkuqi</b>, built in 1709-59, painted in 1763. Part of the complex is also a vaulted chapel of Cosma and Damian, built in 1736, painted in 1750. The buildings of the monastery were destroyed by bombs in 1942, but the church and chapel survived.<br/>Domed and vaulted basilica church. Occasionally used. Protected area. Church built area 192 m<sup>2</sup>, max. height 8 m. Chapel built area 60 m<sup>2</sup>, max. height 4 m.</p> <p><u>Recent restoration:</u> Perimeter walls reinstated, cracks in dome of church in 2015. Cost 433 k ALL (3.5 k €). Work by RDCH Korça. Fresco consolidation. Done by RDCH Korça.</p> <p><u>Current state:</u> In the church, restoration of corbelled arch and frescos restoration. 2018 + being done by RDCH Korça.</p> <p><u>Future restoration:</u> In the chapel, full restoration, both structurally and frescos (approved).</p> |

|  |
|--|
| <p><b>7. Church of the Archangels Gabriel and Michael, Vithkuqi</b>, built in 1699, painted in 1712 and 1728.<br/> Domed and vaulted basilica. Regularly used. Protected area (2017).<br/> Built area 410 m<sup>2</sup>, max. height 8 m.</p>  |
| <p><u>Recent restoration</u>: Complete rebuild of roof structure and covering. 2014. Cost 1.06 M ALL ( 8.5 k €). Work by RDCH Korça. Fresco consolidation. 2015. Done by RDCH Korça.<br/> <u>Current state</u>: Serious structural cracks in the crown of the nave and walls. Frescos need attention. Humidity problem.<br/> <u>Future restoration</u>: Structural review to resolve major concerns on movements on vault and walls. Northern wall has dampness problem. Timber joists tying columns. Floor in narthex. Arcade columns stabilised. Southern wall (arcade). Frescos need restoration after humidity problems solved (approved).</p> |
| <p><b>8. Church of the Prophet Elijah, Voskopoja</b>, built in 1751. Consists of nave and cloister. No frescos.<br/> Wood roof basilica. Not currently used. Protected area.<br/> Total built area 260 m<sup>2</sup>, max. height 11.5 m, surrounding area 1950 m<sup>2</sup>.</p>   |
| <p><u>Recent restoration</u>: Waterproofing and full repair of the roof, consolidation south and west masonry walls, timber joists tying columns in nave, floor in nave and cloister, perimeter drainage around church, adjacent bell tower rebuilt, removal of surrounding mud and silt, surrounding fences. 2016-17. Cost 9 M ALL (72 k €), work by contractor.<br/> <u>Current state</u>: Structure fairly sound. No frescos to restore.<br/> <u>Future restoration</u>: Interior to be cleaned and re-plastered. New gate at entrance. Electrical power for lighting, alarm system.</p>  |
| <p><b>9. Church of St. George, Vithkuqi</b>, built and painted in the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century.<br/> Wood roof basilica. Not currently used. Protected area (2015).<br/> Built area 120 m<sup>2</sup>, max. height 7m.</p>   |
| <p><u>Recent restoration</u>: Frescos consolidated in 2015-16.<br/> <u>Current state</u>: Work on-going on roof replacement and ceiling. 2018+. Cost 3.85 M ALL (31 k €) – a donation. Work by RDCH Korça. Some frescos being restored (planned). Work by RDCH Korça.<br/> <u>Future restoration</u>: Electrical power supply, alarm, humidity control.</p>  |



**10. The church of the Monastery of St. John the Forerunner (Prodromios), Voskopoja**, founded in 1630. Church built in 1632-4 and painted in 1659. The monastery was bombed in 1944 suffering heavy damage. Serious theft followed. Protected area of monument of culture (2015). Church is cross-cupola type. Church occasionally used. Recently restored Monastery buildings used as accommodation. Built area (church?) 220 m<sup>2</sup>, max. height 9 m, surrounding area 3000 m<sup>2</sup>.

Recent restoration: Monastery main chamber rebuilt 2016-17. Cost 6.5 M ALL (52 k €), work by contractor. Church roof maintenance. 2018. Cost 150 k ALL (1.2 k €), work by RDCH, Korça. Some frescos done by RDCH Korça.

Current state: Church nominally adequate, part of rebuilt Monastery usable but west wing in ruins and needs rebuilding.

Future restoration: Frescos major challenge (approved) – monochrome from fire, church roof and interior need further work. Alarm system. West wing of monastery to be rebuilt.

**11. Church of St. Mary, Vithkuqi**, built in 16<sup>th</sup> century, painted in 17<sup>th</sup> century. Cross-cupola type. Not currently used. Protected area (2017). Built area 210 m<sup>2</sup>, surrounding area 576 m<sup>2</sup>.

Recent restoration: Partial repair of roof. 2016. Cost 907 k ALL (72 k €). Work by RDCH Korça. Frescos consolidated and basic repairs. 2015. Done by RDCH Korça.

Current state: Further repairs needed.

Future restoration: Windows replaced. Plaster and frescos restored. Drainage enhanced. Electrical power for lighting. Alarm system.

**12. Church of the Holy Trinity in Lavdar**, built at the end of 14<sup>th</sup> century. Cross-cupola type. Not currently used.

Recent restoration: Walls unstable and temporally supported (2014). Church financed.

Current state: Walls still supported. Problems with humidity. Roof condition poor. Frescos in poor condition.

Future restoration: Studies in hand. Roof repair (Nov. 2018). Full restoration required.

#### Notes

- Exchange rate taken at 125 ALL = 1 €.
- RDCH Regional Directorate of Cultural Heritage.

| Description          | units    | unit cost | Church name              |                         |                           |                         |                        |                           |                         |                          |                         |                         |                          |                           |                         |                           | Total €        | %tot. |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|-------|
|                      |          | €         | 1.Archangels, Voskopoja. | 2.Dormition, Voskopoja. | 3.St. Nicolas, Voskopoja. | 4.St. Athanasius, Vosk. | 5.St. George, Shipcka. | 6.Peter & Paul, Vithkuqi. | 6A.Chapel Peter & Paul. | 7. Archangels, Vithkuqi. | 8.Prophet Elijah, Vosk. | 9.St. George, Vithkuqi. | 10. St. John, Voskopoja. | 10A. Monastery buildings. | 11. St. Mary, Vithkuqi. | 12. Holy Trinity, Lavdar. |                |       |
| Roof                 | m2       | 250       | 480                      | 423                     | 540                       | 340                     | 328                    | 192                       | 60                      | 410                      | 260                     | 120                     | 220                      | 632                       | 210                     | 200                       |                |       |
|                      | % to do  |           | 60                       | 0                       | 5                         | 10                      | 0                      | 10                        | 10                      | 5                        | 0                       | 0                       | 25                       | 40                        | 10                      | 30                        |                |       |
|                      | Cost €   |           | 72000                    | 0                       | 6750                      | 8500                    | 0                      | 4800                      | 1500                    | 5125                     | 0                       | 0                       | 13750                    | 63200                     | 5250                    | 15000                     | 195875         | 7     |
| Structure            | m2 roof  | 500       | 480                      | 423                     | 540                       | 340                     | 328                    | 192                       | 60                      | 410                      | 260                     | 120                     | 220                      | 632                       | 210                     | 200                       |                |       |
|                      | % to do  |           | 50                       | 15                      | 10                        | 10                      | 15                     | 15                        | 50                      | 25                       | 5                       | 5                       | 5                        | 25                        | 10                      | 75                        |                |       |
|                      | Cost €   |           | 120000                   | 31725                   | 27000                     | 17000                   | 24600                  | 14400                     | 15000                   | 51250                    | 6500                    | 3000                    | 5500                     | 79000                     | 10500                   | 75000                     | 480475         | 16    |
| Frescos/interior     | m2       | 500       | 850                      | 750                     | 900                       | 600                     | 600                    | 400                       | 90                      | 625                      | 490                     | 280                     | 450                      | 0                         | 450                     | 430                       |                |       |
|                      | % to do  |           | 100                      | 80                      | 70                        | 75                      | 50                     | 50                        | 100                     | 75                       | 10                      | 25                      | 70                       |                           | 25                      | 80                        |                |       |
|                      | Cost €   |           | 425000                   | 300000                  | 315000                    | 225000                  | 150000                 | 100000                    | 45000                   | 234375                   | 24500                   | 35000                   | 157500                   | 0                         | 56250                   | 172000                    | 2239625        | 76    |
| Other works          | €        | sum       | 1000                     | 5000                    | 5000                      | 5000                    | 1000                   | 2500                      | 1000                    | 2500                     | 5000                    | 5000                    | 5000                     | 2500                      | 5000                    | 2500                      | 48000          | 2     |
| Sub total works      | €        |           | 618000                   | 336725                  | 353750                    | 255500                  | 175600                 | 121700                    | 62500                   | 293250                   | 36000                   | 43000                   | 181750                   | 144700                    | 77000                   | 264500                    | 2963975        | 100   |
| Preparation          | €        | 20% wks.  | 123600                   | 67345                   | 70750                     | 51100                   | 35120                  | 24340                     | 12500                   | 58650                    | 7200                    | 8600                    | 36350                    | 28940                     | 15400                   | 52900                     | 592795         |       |
| Services/Supervisor  | €        | 8% wks.   | 49440                    | 26938                   | 28300                     | 20440                   | 14048                  | 9736                      | 5000                    | 23460                    | 2880                    | 3440                    | 14540                    | 11576                     | 6160                    | 21160                     | 237118         |       |
| Contingencies        |          | 15% wks.  | 92700                    | 50509                   | 53063                     | 38325                   | 26340                  | 18255                     | 9375                    | 43988                    | 5400                    | 6450                    | 27263                    | 21705                     | 11550                   | 39675                     | 444596         |       |
| <b>Grand Total</b>   | <b>€</b> |           | <b>883740</b>            | <b>481517</b>           | <b>505863</b>             | <b>365365</b>           | <b>251108</b>          | <b>174031</b>             | <b>89375</b>            | <b>419348</b>            | <b>51480</b>            | <b>61490</b>            | <b>259903</b>            | <b>206921</b>             | <b>110110</b>           | <b>378235</b>             | <b>4238484</b> |       |
| Phase 1 priority     |          |           |                          |                         | 505863                    | 365365                  |                        |                           |                         | 419348                   |                         |                         |                          |                           |                         |                           | 1290575        | 30    |
| Other Phases         |          |           | 883740                   | 481517                  |                           |                         | 251108                 | 174031                    | 89375                   |                          | 51480                   | 61490                   | 259903                   | 206921                    | 110110                  | 378235                    | 2947909        | 70    |
| Voskopoja only       |          |           | 883740                   | 481517                  | 505863                    | 365365                  | 251108                 |                           |                         |                          | 51480                   |                         | 259903                   | 206921                    |                         |                           | 3005896        | 71    |
| Assumed 1€ = 125 ALL |          |           |                          |                         |                           |                         |                        |                           |                         |                          |                         |                         |                          |                           |                         |                           |                |       |

### **Restoration of painted frescos in the Churches of Voskopoja and Vithkuqi-Albania**

The mural paintings in the Churches of Voskopoja and Vithkuqi are preserved to different levels, but generally rather extensively. Damage on most of the painted surface is manifest through fall of paint and plaster, as well as loss of material and visual intensity of the colours, due to the effects of humidity and moisture. The mural paintings are made with the *a fresco* technique, and have an exceptional artistic and historic value. They are an integral part of the buildings and are a most important component for the perception of the space of the churches. To faithful people they also represent a fundamental spiritual support to experience the presence of the divine.

The urgent need for restoration calls for immediate action. Interventions shall require not only highly qualified workmanship-namely specialized conservators- but also a wider interdisciplinary approach. Most appropriate procedures and techniques should be carefully planned and executed. Because of the substantial visual impact of lacunae in the appreciation of the aesthetical values of painted surfaces, a most relevant aspect of their restoration will be the treatment of the gaps, which should be implemented according to the principles and methodology exposed in Brandi's Theory of Restoration and reflected in many international recommendations.

This appendix results from the discussions held during the 7ME mission and its objective is to underline some key guidelines for the restoration on the painted plasters.

- Scholarly investigations should be considered as an important component of the restoration process, since they give a higher understanding of the historic and material fabric of the artefacts. These investigations should be extended to a diachronic study of the fabric, including not only the painted plasters, but also the building itself with its construction phases. Such investigations should highlight the building techniques, the historical layering, materials and techniques used for the completion of the artefact in its entirety (masonry and paint). Past maintenance interventions and repairs should be equally assessed.
- Understanding of the alteration processes should be included into the diagnostic study to properly design the interventions.
- International symposia/meetings of experts should be promoted to widen the experience and to share the results of investigations and discussion on the proposed actions.
- Conservation/restoration of wall paintings requires specific knowledge, skills and experience in order to minimize any alteration caused by the intervention. Conservators/restorers trained and educated in specialized institutes can help address this difficult task by participating actively in training programmes.

- Interdisciplinary collaboration and exchange of knowledge with international Institutions and specialists is a most relevant means for fostering best practice and strengthening local capacities.
- Intervention on painted plasters should follow after the necessary structural intervention. Water leakage from the roofs or humidity coming from the base of the walls is a major threat for the conservation of plasters and should be eliminated before addressing the restoration of the painted surfaces.
- Before and during structural and architectural works the painted plasters should be protected against damage. Temporary fixing of paint and plaster with reversible procedures can help in preserving the integrity of painted surfaces until their final restoration.
- Inappropriate methods and materials for temporary fixing or along the restoration works can result in irreparable damage. Good practice suggests testing materials before intervention. Traditional materials and techniques can guarantee the highest results in terms of compatibility and structural integrity of the plasters.
- Methods and materials should take into account the possibility for future treatments. The use of new materials and methods should be based on laboratory and on-site testing.
- Consolidation, cleaning and reintegration should not damage at any level the material and pictorial integrity and authenticity of the painted plasters. Removal of later transformations/additions should remain as an exception, since they represent, if removed, an irreversible loss. Their removal is to be thus carefully evaluated.
- Natural ageing traces the life history, thus it is a testimony that should be respected.
- All additions should be easily removable. Over-painting is generally not a good practice.
- Intervention on painted plasters aims at their conservation as well as at improving their legibility in terms of form and content. The treatment of the lacuna is thus fundamental.
- Reintegration contributes at minimising the visibility of damage, provided that it preserves the authenticity of the image. The theory of restoration provides a methodology for reducing the invasiveness of the filling of gaps. To preserve the aesthetical values and make it possible to enhance through the restoration process all the potentials of a painting, the theory of restoration distinguishes the intervention based on the typology of the lacuna and its visual impact on the figurative expression of the painting.
- Intervention should consider the difference between lacunae in order to reduce the visual invasiveness of the discontinuities in the painted surface. Lacunae differ in extension and depth.
- Five kinds of lacunae can be generally found:
  - a. Decay of the patina.
  - b. Decay of paint.

- c. Loss of the paint and plaster, which admits reconstruction on a scientific basis.
  - d. Loss of paint and plaster, which cannot be reconstructed on a scientific basis.
  - e. Lacunae which belong to regular patterns, which can easily be reconstructed due to their regular design.
- In case it is not possible to reconstruct the painted surface (case "d"), the lacuna is generally treated with a layer of material placed recessed, which will have the same visual texture and consistency as the underneath supporting layer (e.g. if the plaster is missing, the lacuna should be treated as the render layer; if the render is missing, the masonry should be left visible).
  - A programme of documentation highlighting the present condition, the alteration process and the actions that were implemented improves the quality of future interventions. This includes analytical and critical reports, surveys, photographs, mapping. Reports available either through digital media or in more traditional printed form are an important component of best practice.

Given the importance of the churches and their painted surfaces an international cooperation and funding should be considered also as a means for rising awareness on this exceptional document of art.

Useful reference documents/publications for the restoration of painted churches:

- Cesare Brandi, *Theory of Restoration*, Nardini, Rome 2005
- Venice charter (1964)
- Charters and international recommendations for restoration of cultural heritage;
- Code of Ethics of the ICOM-Committee of Conservation (1984)
- Professional guidelines by E.C.C.O. (European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations) (1997)
- Paolo Mora, Laura Mora and Paul Philippot, *Conservation of Wall Paintings*. Sevenoaks: Butterworths, 1984. (Particularly chapters: " Causes of alteration in wall paintings" and "Problems of presentation").
- Documents and guidelines by ENCoRE (European Network for Conservation-Restoration Education).
- The Icomos Principles for the Preservation and Conservation-Restoration of Wall Paintings (2003).

Paolo Vitti

Typical photographs.



St. Athanasius (mission's visit).



Frescos – splendour, cracks and damage.