

The Hague, 28 June 2019

## It's not too late to save Hasankeyf!

**At their meetings that were held in Athens on 18-19 June 2019, the Board and Council of Europa Nostra deplored the lack of positive news and developments in Hasankeyf. The present public statement is the result of these discussions and serious concerns. It contains numerous reasons why Europa Nostra strongly believes that the Turkish authorities should refrain from flooding Hasankeyf and its surroundings.**

Despite the significant degradation of individual monuments, including the Citadel mount, Europa Nostra recalls that Hasankeyf and its surroundings still form one of the most important archaeological and architectural sites in Europe, boasting rich biodiversity and 12,000 years of human history. The Neolithic mound at Hasankeyf, now only partially excavated, is the site of one of the earliest organized human settlements discovered anywhere. For all these reasons, Europa Nostra reiterates its belief that it is incumbent not only on Turkey but on the entire international community to ensure that this treasure is safeguarded.

In 2016, Europa Nostra listed the Ancient City of Hasankeyf among on the 7 Most Endangered sites in Europe. As Hasankeyf remains one of the most valuable witnesses of Islamic cultural heritage in a country that is a member of the Council of Europe, Europa Nostra firmly believes that it should be conserved not only according to the national law but also according to international and European conventions and recommendations.

With its Sâlihiyye Gardens and the orchards of Rasçem on the banks of the river Tigris, present-day Hasankeyf exemplifies the integral role that garden districts and irrigated hinterlands played in Anatolia Seljuk urban design.<sup>1</sup> While these medieval gardens have largely disappeared across Turkey and Iran, the remains of villas, fountains, and water distribution networks in Hasankeyf offer visitors extraordinary insight into the technological and artistic milieu in which the 12<sup>th</sup> century inventor and robotics pioneer al-Jazari (el-Cezeri) lived and worked.<sup>2,3</sup> The Sâlihiyye and Kâsimiyye districts are unique, and the level of the reservoir should be kept low enough to prevent them from being flooded.

Europa Nostra deplores the fact that over the course of two years, Turkish authorities have removed Hasankeyf's most invaluable, symbolic and visually striking architectural elements; built massive reinforcement walls and filled recently discovered cave dwellings.

<sup>1</sup> Redford, Scott. *Landscape and the state in medieval Anatolia : Seljuk Gardens and pavilions of Alanya, Turkey*. Oxford : Archaeopress, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Jazari, ibn Razzaz. *The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices* [Kitab fi ma'rifat al-hiyal al-handasiyya]. Trans. Donald R. Hill. Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1974.

<sup>3</sup> El-Cezeri, Bedî ûz-Zamân Ebû'l-'îzz İsmâ'il b. er-Rezzâz. *El-Câmi' Beyne'l-'İlm ve'l-'Amel en-Nâfi' fi es-Sinaâ'ti'l-Hiyel*. Çev. Sevim Tekeli, Melek Dosay, Yavuz Unat. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 2002.



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These actions - carried out in accordance with the government's highly controversial plan to salvage the cultural heritage of the ancient city in preparation for flooding beneath the waters of the Ilisu reservoir - have significantly altered the historic landscape and caused irreparable damage to individual monuments of Hasankeyf.

The Zeynel Bey Tomb, which was known as one of the most distinctive monuments of Hasankeyf, is now dwarfed by the modern concrete structures of the new settlement area. The Imam Abdullah Tomb, which is the single most important religious monument for the people of Hasankeyf and which originally stood on a hill guarding the entrance to the historic city, now sits unceremoniously on a slope below the new marketplace. In recent decades, the funerary complex known as the "Kızlar" or "Ayyubid" Mosque, has served as the main mosque of Hasankeyf. This modern adaptation is an integral part of the building's history. Unfortunately, the modern prayer hall was demolished before the medieval structure was dismantled and transferred in pieces to its new location, where it has little relevance to the local community.

Europa Nostra strongly condemns the fact that the design, planning and execution of Turkey's cultural heritage conservation programme in Hasankeyf have been carried out without providing sufficient documentation to the public and certainly without having conducted sufficient consultation with either the local or the scholarly community. The blatant disregard for the relationship of the local people to the town's architectural heritage is particularly reprehensible.

Given the degradation of the site and the debatable design and implementation of the monument removal project, it is difficult to see how the town will remain able to attract the number of visitors required to sustain the various businesses that have hitherto operated in historic Hasankeyf. We urge Turkish authorities to avoid such an economic catastrophe for the region. More generally, the operation of the scheme should be optimized to limit the damage done to the city and the environment. This should be discussed with all interested parties. Being practically the last near-pristine catchment area of a major river in the Middle East, the Tigris basin holds the potential to produce significant economic value for generations to come, provided that it is managed in a socially and environmentally sustainable way.

In addition, Hasankeyf and the Upper Tigris Valley constitute a crucial part of a biodiversity hotspot that provides habitat for numerous threatened species. The creation of a lake in place of a river would destroy the sandy banks that provide nesting ground for the endangered Euphrates softshell turtle (*Rufetas Euphraticus*),<sup>4</sup> and the colder temperatures and lower oxygen levels may make the lake uninhabitable for the leopard barbel (*Barbus subquincunciatus*)<sup>5</sup> and Diyarbakır spined loach (*Cobitis kellei*),<sup>6</sup> two critically endangered fish species recently observed near Hasankeyf.

Of the approximately 470 bird species known in Turkey, more than 130 have been observed in Hasankeyf. Twenty-five of these are threatened. The Ilisu reservoir would eliminate the steep soil slopes next to the river, which are used for nesting by the pied kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*), one of the most endangered riparian bird species in Turkey.<sup>7</sup> The higher water level of the reservoir may also make the rock cliffs along the river unsuitable brooding ground for the endangered Bonelli's eagle (*Hieraaetus fasciatus*), as appears to have happened at Halfeti as a result of the Birecik dam.<sup>8</sup>

A new plant species, *Salvia hasankeyfense*, was first identified in 2015 and is thought to be critically endangered, as it is confined to a small area around Hasankeyf.<sup>9</sup> Turkey has a responsibility to document and monitor the biological diversity of the Upper Tigris basin and protect the area's threatened species from extinction.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Eken, G., M. Bozdoğan, S. İsfendiyaroğlu, D.T. Kılıç, and Y. Lise (eds.). 2006. "Türkiye'nin Önemli Doğa Alanları" [Turkey's Key Biodiversity Areas]. Doğa Derneği, Ankara, Turkey (2006). <https://www.dogadernegi.org/onemli-doga-alanlari/>

<sup>5</sup> "Hasankeyf'te leopar sazani bulundu." T24.com, 27 July 2011. <https://t24.com.tr/haber/hasankeyfte-leopar-sazani-bulundu,158906>

<sup>6</sup> Füsün Erkakan, F. Güler Atalay-Ekmekçi, Teodor T. Nalbant. "Four new species and one new subspecies of the genus *Cobitis* (Pisces: Ostariophysi: Cobitidae) from Turkey." *Tr. J. of Zoology*, 22 (1998): 9-15 <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.566.1693&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Biricik, Murat and Recep Karakas. "Birds of Hasankeyf (South-Eastern Anatolia, Turkey) Under the Threat of a Big Dam Project." *Natural Areas Journal*. 32.1 (2012): 96-105. <http://www.bioone.org/doi/abs/10.3375/043.032.0111>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ferhat Celep, Tuncay Dirmenci, Özal Guner. "*Salvia hasankeyfense* (Lamiaceae), a new species from Hasankeyf (Batman, South-eastern Turkey)." *Phytotaxa* 227.3 (2015): 289–294. <http://dx.doi.org/10.11646/phytotaxa.227.3.9>

<sup>10</sup> " 'Frightening' number of plant extinctions found in global study," *The Guardian*, 10 June 2019, [https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jun/10/frightening-number-of-plant-extinctions-found-in-global-survey?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other&fbclid=IwAR3gUicv-mgA7gRBjXHzVrTxrNANMpcpg1A9u4HKVmlBehVFIR4X\\_trhoFY](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jun/10/frightening-number-of-plant-extinctions-found-in-global-survey?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other&fbclid=IwAR3gUicv-mgA7gRBjXHzVrTxrNANMpcpg1A9u4HKVmlBehVFIR4X_trhoFY)

Europa Nostra also wishes to recall that the right to participate in the cultural life of the community, including the conservation of cultural heritage,<sup>11</sup> is a fundamental human right. Europa Nostra therefore urges the government of Turkey to undertake a systematic process for broad and substantive stakeholder consultation, including a cross-section of people from the region as well as independent scholars, experts, and non-governmental organisations, to reach consensus on the optimal way to preserve the vast and largely undocumented archaeological treasure and biological diversity of Hasankeyf and the Tigris River basin in Turkey.

To end, Europa Nostra calls upon Turkey to observe its obligations under international law, including the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage and the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity. In particular, Turkey's bilateral agreements with Iraq and Syria require the equitable management of shared water resources and to guarantee sufficient water flows to sustain the natural ecosystem of the Mesopotamian Marshlands of Iraq.<sup>12</sup>

Europa Nostra shall disseminate widely the present appeal to all stakeholders concerned in Turkey, in Europe and in the wider international circles.

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<sup>11</sup> Final statement by Dutch NCP for OECD Guidelines: Fivas, the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive and Hasankeyf Matters vs Bresser, 20 August 2018. <https://www.oecdguidelines.nl/latest/news/2018/08/20/fs-fivas-the-initiative-to-keep-hasankeyf-alive-and-hasankeyf-matters-vs-bresser>

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO World Heritage List, The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of Biodiversity and the Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1481>