

KREMLIN AND RED SQUARE ABOUT TO LOSE WORLD HERITAGE STATUS



Russian president Vladimir Putin wants to alter the area around the Kremlin in Moscow. Such changes however could cost Russia's center of power its status as a UNESCO world heritage site.

A UNESCO experts commission is currently contemplating the possibility of taking the Kremlin and Red Square off the UNESCO world heritage list. There are two main reasons for such a step. First, President Putin will have the building number 14 on this historic area removed. Secondly, he wants to erect a monument to Prince Vladimir, celebrated founder of the Russian state. This statue is going to stand on Borowizki plaza, 500 meters from the main visitors' entrance.

Both changes can compromise the Kremlin's status as a UNESCO world heritage site. In recent years, there have been several confrontations between the Kremlin and monument conservators. Experts threatened to sue when the administration at the historic Kutafja gate erected two visitor pavilions with turnstiles. The big escalation happened in 2013, when Putin ordered the construction of a helipad. Thousands of cubic meters of ground were excavated and trees relocated. Now, tensions are getting high again.

Regarding the building, monument conservator Todor Krestew ensures that everything has been talked over with the respective authorities. International experts confirmed that the „Building No. 14“ is of no architectural value. „We have green a light for demolition.“

In socialist times, the highest state organ, the Supreme Soviet, held its assemblies in the yellow building. Afterwards, it was home to a press department of the Kremlin. In order to avoid tremors, no heavy machinery except for cranes may be used. The site is covered with canvases and builders spray water on the emerging dust so it does not come into contact with neighboring buildings.

The monument is evidently going to be a larger issue. The highest part of the Kremlin's wall is only nineteen meters high. However, the 300-ton heavy statue is planned to reach 24 meters.

In September the Moscow city council assembly based their decision of the monument's location on an Internet poll. 62 percent had voted for Borowizki plaza, which is close to the Kremlin. The suggestion came from the Russian military history society, who initiated the voting.

Since then, monument conservators have been up in arms. In their opinion, the statue would destroy the historically grown city core. This led to the first warning by UNESCO in late September: they recommended to refrain from using this site. This recommendation still stands, which city councilwoman Jelena Schuwalowa came to know in a recent official reply to her query at UNESCO.

Naturally, it seems best to find possible compromises before the experts decide. However, the work on the statue has already begun.

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