

Mr. Vladimir Putin
President of the Russian Federation
Ilyinka Street
Moscow, 103132

RUSSIA

Open Letter, 18 March 2014

Dear Mr. President,

As the presidents and chairmen of the world's leading international Construction History Societies we are deeply concerned about the current plans regarding the world famous Shabolovskaja Radio Tower in Moscow.

Erected 1919-22 according to the designs of Russian Engineer Vladimir G. Shukhov, the Shabolovskaja Tower served as a symbol of national broadcasting and, at 150 metres high, was for decades the tallest structure in the young Soviet Union. Hugely ambitious, it was realised during an era of shortages of both material and labour, yet still achieved the highest standards of engineering. Unlike most of Shukhov's towers, its steel structure is a multi-section hyperboloid. The structural stability was its fundamental quality, highly prized in the uncertainty of the post-war period.

The Shabolovskaja Tower is universally recognised not only as a unique monument from the era of Russia's industrialisation and an icon of Russian avant-garde but also as a seminal master-piece in the history of civil engineering. Developed in Russia, its structural concept has influenced structural engineering and the concepts of structural lightness in 20th century architecture worldwide. Shukhov's tower is a jewel of global construction history.

As we've been advised by colleagues and through the international media the tower is currently in great danger: A proposal to dismantle and relocate was recently endorsed, the disassembly could start within weeks. An operation like this would definitely destroy most of the original structural components and endanger all important heritage values of the monument. The idea to re-erect it in a different place in Moscow contradicts to the purpose of its dedication as a 'monument' under the National heritage legislation.

We are deeply grateful that the Russian government has allocated financial support for repair. But the intended method of "repair" contradicts all international standards in dealing with monuments of global importance like this. In fact immediate steps have to be taken to allow the Shabolovka Tower to remain in place. A thorough investigation is needed to inform the repairs and a full-scale in-situ restoration project, which will bring benefit to Russia and world culture.

There is no time to wait. In accordance with the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee for Twentieth-Century Heritage (ISC20C) and the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on the Analysis and Restoration of Structures of Architectural Heritage (ISCARSAH) we therefore appeal directly to you and ask for your intervention in order to prevent serious risk of damage of the outstanding heritage qualities of Russia's heritage, the Shukhov Tower.

Mr President, we ask that you:

- Declare a moratorium for any actions regarding the Shukhov Tower
- Care for retaining the tower on its site, protecting this integral attribute of its heritage significance;
- Commission an expert study of this steel hyperboloid construction on the basis of international conservation experience, seeking detailed advice about repairs, having in mind the outstanding global value of the Shukhov Tower;
- Await the outcomes of this scientifically based action before taking any final decision;
- Demonstrate leadership in the heritage field by commissioning the preparation of a standard Conservation Plan for the Shukhov Tower, thereby applying international benchmark standards for conservation works;
- Secure protection of the Shukhov Tower by effective Federal heritage listing;

There is a lot of international experience on the field of investigation and structural preservation of steel structures like this, and there is lot of scientific knowledge particularly regarding Shukhov's structures - not least gathered within the recently finished international research project 'Construction Knowledge of Early Modernity - Shukhov's Strategies of Spare Steel Structures'.

We can offer to you and the Russian authorities the support of the international scientific and engineering community represented by the world's leading Construction History Societies.

Prof. Giovanni Benvenuto – Italy

President – Associazione Benvenuto

Prof. Brian Bowen – United States of America

Chairman – Construction History Society of America

Dr. James Campbell – United Kingdom

President – Construction History Society

Jürg Conzett – Switzerland

President – Gesellschaft für Ingenieurbaukunst

Prof. Santiago Huerta – Spain

President – Sociedad Espanola de Historia de la Construcción

Prof. Werner Lorenz – Germany

Chairman – Gesellschaft für Bautechnikgeschichte

Prof. Michel Provost – Belgium

Chairman – Comité Patrimoine et Histoire de la FABI

Prof. Joël Sakarovitch – France

President – Assoc. Francophone d' Histoire de la Construction