THEMATIC REPORT

RESTORATION OF THE NATIONAL PUPPET THEATER AND THE BUILDING OF THE FORMERLY PERSECUTED



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MINISTRIA E TURIZMIT, KULTURËS DHE SPORTIT

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Cover Photo Caption

Restored National Puppet Theater

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Foreword

The *EU4Culture Thematic Report Series* has been developed by UNOPS to document and share the experience and lessons learned from the conservation works implemented under the EU4Culture programme. This Series aims to serve as a professional resource for those engaged in the field of cultural heritage conservation, contributing to knowledge exchange and the continuous advancement of conservation practices in Albania and beyond.

The *EU4Culture Thematic Report Series* includes:

1. Conservation of the "Shqipëria" Mosaic on the Façade of the National Historical Museum
2. Conservation of Wall Paintings
3. Handling Artefacts
4. Conservation of Fortified Architecture and Archaeological Ruins
5. Conservation of Engineering Works and Historic Residential Dwellings
6. Restoration of the National Puppet Theater and the Building of the Formerly Persecuted

The EU4Culture programme, funded by the European Union and implemented by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), was launched in the aftermath of the 2019 earthquake, which caused significant damage to cultural heritage sites and monuments in Albania. While conceived as a heritage recovery initiative, its objectives extended beyond the conservation and restoration of damaged sites. By improving the physical condition, accessibility, safety, and interpretive value of cultural monuments, the programme sought to enhance public understanding and appreciation of Albania's cultural heritage, attract more visitors to restored sites, strengthen their role as tourism assets, and contribute to local socio-economic development. The programme also placed strong emphasis on capacity building, fostering a lasting sense of stewardship and supporting the continued preservation and sustainable use of Albania's cultural heritage.

The EU4Culture programme, running from October 2020 to June 2026, was carried out in close collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport[1], as well as its subordinate institutions — including the National Institute for Cultural Heritage and the Regional Directorates of National Culture in Tirana and Shkodra.

1. Formerly Ministry of Culture (2020–2024), and Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation (2024–2025)

Cooperation also extended to the Municipalities of Durrës, Kavaja, Lezha, Kruja, Kurbin, Rrogozhina, and Tirana ensuring a locally grounded and inclusive approach to heritage conservation.

Recognizing the importance of capacity building, the project established a strong link with academic institutions, notably the University of Tirana (Department of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Management) and the Polytechnic University of Tirana (Faculties of Architecture and Civil Engineering). These partnerships enabled young professionals and students to engage directly in fieldwork, transforming ongoing conservation activities into valuable platforms for experiential learning.

In total, the EU4Culture programme engaged 14 licensed conservation contractors, two multidisciplinary design companies, one supervision firm, and one commissioning company. The conservation and restoration interventions alone accounted for approximately 70,000 working days, representing the daily efforts of around 70 professionals from diverse disciplines and contributing to the timely and high-quality completion of the works.

Through this collaborative effort, 19 cultural heritage assets across Albania were restored, while four were equipped with the tools and equipment needed to support improved conservation, documentation, and operation. The outcomes, methodologies, and insights gained from these interventions are presented in a series of six thematic reports, each focusing on a different typology of conservation work: mosaic conservation; wall paintings; artefact handling; fortified architecture and archaeological ruins; engineering works and historic residential dwellings; and the restoration of selected public heritage buildings.

Read together, the six publications offer a comprehensive record of the EU4Culture programme's technical approach and practical lessons learned. They reflect not only the tangible achievements of the programme, but also the collective dedication of all those who contributed to its implementation — from national and local institutions, conservation professionals, designers, contractors, supervisors, academics, students, and community representatives, to the many individuals who supported the works on site. Their commitment, expertise, and collaboration were essential to safeguarding and celebrating Albania's cultural legacy.


TEATRI
KUKULLAVE

IN NUMBERS

Months taken for Implementation

The National Puppet Theater	31
The Building of Formerly Persecuted	13

Material approvals

The National Puppet Theater	98
The Building of Formerly Persecuted	51

Number of approvals received

The National Puppet Theater	3
The Building of Formerly Persecuted	1

Workforce for design

The National Puppet Theater	450 labour days
The Building of Formerly Persecuted	550 labour days

Workforce for implementation

The National Puppet Theater	5741 labour days
The Building of Formerly Persecuted	2912 labour days

Workforce for supervision

The National Puppet Theater	2022 labour days
The Building of Formerly Persecuted	848 labour days

Financial investment

The National Puppet Theater	278,018,092.85 ALL (2,880,655.13 EUR)
The Building of Formerly Persecuted	82,870,429.72 ALL (858,673.94 EUR)

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the thematic report

The conservation of designed architecture built in the early 20th century requires a specific focus. While these types of buildings are historical, they are constructed with materials still in use today. Hence, the conservation approach needs to be careful, so that the outcome is not an over-conserved site, but rather a site that appears to be well maintained. It is easy to overdo interventions, since the use of modern materials might give the impression of constructing anew. This approach therefore needs to be carefully controlled to avoid adverse results.

This thematic report presents a comprehensive account of the conservation and restoration works carried out on two culturally significant Albanian monuments: the National Puppet Theater—formerly the First Albanian Parliament building—and the Building of the Formerly Persecuted, both located in Tirana. Together, these structures embody distinct layers of Albania's historical and architectural narrative, from early 20th-century institutional architecture to mid-century residential and administrative heritage. The scope of the thematic report includes an overview of each building's historical background, architectural characteristics, and cultural value, followed by an in-depth documentation of the restoration processes undertaken within the EU4Culture programme. These works encompass structural consolidation, façade and roof rehabilitation, interior restoration, installation of modern mechanical and electrical systems, and improvements for safety, energy efficiency, and long-term sustainability.

The thematic report also outlines the methodologies, materials, and conservation principles applied, as well as the challenges encountered during implementation. By compiling findings, technical approaches, and outcomes for both buildings, the thematic report illustrates a cohesive narrative of Albania's ongoing commitment to preserving its built heritage while adapting it to contemporary functional needs.

1.2 Objectives of the conservation work

The conservation of the National Puppet Theater and the Building of the Formerly Persecuted was guided by a series of clear objectives. These objectives ensured that the process addressed the material integrity, historical significance, and future sustainability of both structures:

- Preserve the authentic fabric and historical stratigraphy

To retain the multilayered historical development of the buildings by protecting original materials, construction techniques, and subsequent historical additions, while avoiding unnecessary replacement or reconstruction.

- Prevent over-restoration through controlled intervention
- To ensure that the use of modern materials and methods does not visually or materially obscure, falsify, or homogenise the historic character, allowing the buildings to retain their authentic patina and historic identity.
- Stabilise and repair existing deterioration
- To diagnose structural conditions after an earthquake and implement targeted treatments that address the causes of deterioration—without altering intact or stable features.
- Ensure compatibility and reversibility of materials
- To select intervention materials that are chemically and physically compatible with the original fabric, and, whenever possible, reversible or retreatable, in line with international conservation charters.
- Conserve character-defining architectural features
- To safeguard stylistic, spatial, and decorative elements characteristic of early 20th-century Albanian architecture, ensuring their legibility for future generations.
- Integrate comprehensive research and documentation
- To base all decisions on archival study, historical analysis, architectural documentation, and scientific diagnostics, and to record all stages of the intervention for future reference.
- Support sustainable long-term use

To ensure that conservation solutions contribute to the continued functional use of both buildings, respecting their historic roles while supporting contemporary needs.

1.3 Importance of the site

The National Puppet Theater[2] is designated a first category monument of culture under the name of “The Building of the First Albanian Parliament, together with its auxiliary spaces”. The designation was made by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport in the year 2000.

This designation guides the conservation intervention. Namely, for first-category monuments no changes nor additions are allowed, either to interior or exterior. The only allowed interventions are those of consolidation of existing structures and conservation of internal and external finishes. All elements defined as authentic must be preserved or restored exactly in the same way as built, using the same materials and techniques of repair.

2. The name of the building would be kept as National Puppet Theater throughout the report

The Building of Formerly Persecuted is designated under this name as a second-category monument of culture, by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport in the year 2007. Similar to the National Puppet Theater, the designation again guides the conservation intervention. In the case of the second-category monuments, and in cases where no separate designation is made for any of its interior features, changes and additions can be done to the interior, while exterior volume, elevation outlook and roof needs to be conserved without any alterations.

1.4 Brief outline of conservation scope and phases

1.4.1 National Puppet Theater

Conservation Design:
The scope for conservation design included:

- Documentation of existing condition including archive research
- Valorisation of historical additions and definition of values
- Structural assessment
- Material assessment

The conservation proposal was done with an objective to conserve the building in its entirety. However, given a number of inappropriate interventions over the years and earthquake damages, the portion of the building pertaining to the stage had to be entirely reconstructed. The materials to be used in implementation are to be primarily materials which are either of the same composition as found in-situ, or are compatible materials in cases where layers of original material were not found.

Additionally, since the conservation design was done for the building to function again as a National Puppet Theater, upgrade of systems, including heating, cooling and ventilation, electrical and water and sewage systems, was also carefully designed. Particular attention was given to the design of new stage mechanisms, as well as the auditorium.

Implementation of Conservation:
Implementation of works included the following aspects:

- Site mobilisation
- Restoration works and reconstruction works in the stage part of the building; including underground civil works. The reconstruction consisted of a faithful reconstruction of the stage both in plan and volume
- Full structural stabilisation using carbon fiber strappings
- Restoration of the roof structure and drainage (the replacement of the roof, implementing a drainage structure on the perimeter of the building)
- Façades and interior restoration

- New mechanical works, new electrical circuits, water supply system, waste water system, HVAC, fire fighting system
- Stage technology works: fire curtain, orchestra lift, stage lifts machinery, auditorium seats, theatre textile, audio boards/stage audio system, hall's projector, the supporting raising system, etc.
- Accessibility scheme for people with disabilities and emergency exit scheme.

1.4.2 The Building of the Formerly Persecuted

Conservation Design:
The scope for conservation design included:

- Documentation of existing conditions including archive research
- Valorisation of historical additions and definition of values
- Structural assessment
- Material assessment.

The conservation proposal was done with the objective to conserve the building, primarily the roof, façade, floors, ceilings, timber staircase and finishes. The materials to be used in implementation are in line with conservation practices and are primarily materials which are either of the same composition as those found in-situ or are compatible materials, in cases where no original material layers were found.

The design was developed for the building to be used as offices; hence, the upgrading of systems, including heating, ventilation, cooling, electrical, water, and sewage systems, was also carefully designed.

Implementation of Conservation:

Implementation of works included following aspects:
The scope of restoration/rehabilitation works is as follows:

- Site construction and scaffolding for the building façade
- Removal of existing layers of the floors and roofs, removal of the plaster of the interior walls, removal of existing electrical and hydraulic installations, etc.
- Structural consolidation of the load-bearing walls
- Roof inspection and substitution of degraded elements, insulation against heat and water
- Restoration of all internal spaces: rooms, toilets, doors, windows, stairs, floors, etc.
- New mechanical systems (firefighting, water supply, waste water system, rainwater system, HVAC)
- New electrical systems (power supply, fire detection system, LAN, lightning system, CCTV, earthing, digital systems).

2. Description of the buildings and previous restoration interventions

2.1 Description of the National Puppet Theater

The Building of the First Albanian Parliament occupies a unique position in the political and architectural history of Albania. Its origins are directly linked to the resolutions of the Congress of Lushnja, held on 21 January 1920, a landmark event that reaffirmed Albania's independence and safeguarded its territorial integrity after World War I. One of the most consequential decisions of this congress was the proclamation of Tirana as the capital city of Albania on 11 February 1920, which immediately created the need for modern governmental premises capable of supporting the activities of a national parliament.

Initially, parliamentary sessions were held in inadequate and improvised spaces, including the building that today houses the Academy of Sciences located in Tirana. The newly established legislature—first called the National Council (Këshilli Kombëtar)—symbolised the political will of the Albanian people to assume responsibility for their own governance. Yet, the rapid institutional development of the new capital demanded a more dignified and functional building to meet parliamentary standards.

During this time, the Albanian army had begun construction on a building intended as an Officers' Club in the area known as Shallvaret. Documentation from 1924 reveals that its foundations, built of stone and later continued in brick, were already underway, with German-speaking engineers and advisors involved in various technical aspects of the project. Although not originally conceived as a parliamentary building, it soon became clear that, due to limited financial and technical resources, the Officers' Club would provide the most viable structure to house the first national legislature. As a result, the building was adapted to its new civic role and served as the seat of the Albanian Parliament until the Italian invasion in 1939.

Architecturally, the building represented one of the earliest examples of Western-European—particularly Central European and Austro-German—influence in Tirana. It featured a two-storey central block, a high roof with a polygonal drum and dome, and symmetrical side wings bordered by parapets and balustrades. Large, vertically elongated windows and rectilinear columns gave the façade an elegant, monumental character distinct from the surrounding vernacular architecture. Its construction coincided with the first urban expansion plans for Tirana, marking the city's transition from an Ottoman-era market town into a modern administrative capital.

Over the following decades, the building underwent several transformations, reflecting Albania's shifting political climate. In 1930–31, significant renovations altered its appearance: the dome was removed, roofs were rebuilt, openings were reconfigured, and parts of the façade were redesigned. After the abolition of the Parliament in 1939, the structure was repurposed as the Hall of the Fascist Corporation, and later, during the 1950s, as the Soviet Cultural Center ("Klubi i Sovjetikëve"). Between 1960 and 1961, it was converted into the National Puppet Theater, a function it continued to hold for decades.

Despite these changes, the building still preserves substantial original fabric from the 1920s and remains one of Tirana's earliest modern public buildings. Its historical significance stems not only from its architectural qualities but also from its foundational role in the establishment of Albanian parliamentary life. Today, the former parliamentary building stands as a rare and valuable witness to the early state-building era, the evolution of Tirana's urban identity, and the complex political history of 20th-century Albania.

2.1.1 Previous restoration interventions

Over the course of a century, the building of the First Albanian Parliament—later the Soviet Cultural Center and ultimately the National Puppet Theatre—underwent a series of significant interventions. These cumulative changes, recorded across four major construction phases, profoundly altered both the architectural character and functional layout of the monument. Although some interventions were necessary to meet new programmatic needs, many caused irreversible transformations that departed from the original 1920s design.

The *first phase* of the building (1920–1924) represents its original architectural identity: a central two-storey volume with a dome resting on a polygonal drum, symmetrical single-storey wings, open loggias with balustrades, and finely articulated façades with pilasters, stucco reliefs, and monumental windows. Subsequent interventions generally compromised these features, while only a few minor interior enhancements retained historical value.

The *second major intervention phase* occurred in 1930–1931, when the building was adapted and modernised during its time as the Parliament of the Albanian Kingdom. This reconstruction removed the original dome, rebuilt all roofs using Marseille tiles to replace earlier eternit sheets, and altered the façade by eliminating open balustraded wings and reconstructing windows and shutters in the style of the period. Interior changes included the simplification of the southwestern lodge and adjustments to circulation. These works allowed the building to function more effectively as a state institution, but substantially diminished its architectural authenticity and decorative richness.

A *third phase* of interventions took place in the 1950s, when the building was converted into the Soviet Cultural Center ("Soviet Club"). During this transformation, both wings were reconstructed, and efforts were made to reconfigure the interior for cultural programmes rather than parliamentary use. Office partitions were removed to create wide corridors, upper-floor windows were closed, a projection cabin was constructed, and the stage was rebuilt. These modifications introduced a new spatial logic that further distanced the building from its 1920s configuration.

The *fourth phase*, beginning in 1960, adapted the structure into the National Puppet Theatre. This period introduced the most disruptive and least historically sensitive alterations. Interior stucco decorations disappeared, non-original partitions and doors were added, and much of the original furniture and finishing was replaced. The entrance colonnade was closed, southern façade symmetry was damaged through the construction of a deep and elevated stage, and auxiliary spaces were improvised without attention to structural or aesthetic coherence. Additional commercial adaptations—including shopfronts, bars, and a later portico—further alienated the building from its historic appearance.

By the late 20th century, and especially after the 2019 earthquake, deterioration was exacerbated by these accumulated non-specialist interventions. Original windows were replaced with duralumin frames, historic openings were closed with masonry, and the balcony parapet was concealed behind a non-original wall. The stage tower and auxiliary areas, built on shallow foundations, showed advanced structural damage, while interior finishes suffered from moisture, poor material replacements, and inappropriate past restorations.

Overall, former interventions reflect a pattern of frequent functional adaptation without a conservation mindset. While some early modifications supported evolving institutional needs, later interventions—especially during the Puppet Theatre era—compromised architectural integrity, obscured authentic materials, and introduced incompatible additions.

2.2 The Building of the Formerly Persecuted

The Building of the Formerly Persecuted, located on George W. Bush Street in the historic core of Tirana, is one of the city's most distinguished early 20th-century architectural monuments. Constructed during the 1920s–1930s, the building was originally conceived to serve as an archaeological museum, reflecting the Albanian state's early attempts to institutionalise cultural heritage shortly after Tirana was declared capital in 1920. Although initially planned for a cultural function, the building soon underwent a change

of purpose and became the headquarters of the Italian Legation in Tirana, a shift that aligned with the intensifying Italian political and architectural influence in Albania during the interwar period. Its design, characterised by pronounced neo-classical elements, symmetry, and a romantic façade composition, reflects this stylistic context. The early photograph confirms the building's monumental appearance, defined by its central projecting volume, columned portico, and distinctive attic level.

Following World War II, the building entered a new phase of institutional use aligned with the political shifts of socialist Albania. It housed various administrative and representational bodies, including offices of war veterans' associations and the headquarters of Albania's friendship societies with different countries, each reflecting the diplomatic and ideological networks of the time. This continuous repurposing contributed to incremental interior and exterior modifications—some respectful of the original fabric, others compromising the initial design integrity. Nevertheless, the building retained its essential architectural vocabulary: a two-storey rectangular volume, thick masonry walls, a steep pitched roof with Italian tiles, and a carefully articulated façade incorporating framed windows, arches, balustraded balconies, and decorative plaster elements.

In the post-1990 period, after the fall of the communist regime, the building assumed a new symbolic and commemorative role. It became the seat of the Institute of Former Politically Persecuted and the Institute for the Study of the Crimes of Communism, institutions dedicated to documenting, researching, and representing the historical experiences of Albanians persecuted under the former dictatorship. This contemporary function imbues the building with profound cultural significance, transforming it from a diplomatic and administrative structure into a site of memory and public reflection.

Over nearly a century, the building has accumulated layers of history that mirror Albania's political and urban transformations—from the consolidation of the new capital in the 1920s, to the Italian presence, the decades of socialist governance, and finally the democratic transition. Its survival and continued use make it an irreplaceable witness to these eras. Despite transformations and various unsympathetic additions, the building retains its original volumetry and much of its decorative identity, as clearly documented in the contemporary photographs included in the architectural survey.
Today, it stands not only as a notable example of interwar architectural heritage but also as a custodian of national memory, marking the complex trajectory of Albania's 20th-century history.

2.2.1 Previous restoration interventions

The Building of the Formerly Persecuted has undergone several phases of interventions over the course of its nearly one-hundred-year history. These interventions—sometimes restorative, sometimes purely functional—reflect both the changing uses of the building

and the varying levels of technical capacity at different periods. Although many of the works were not conservation-driven, they nonetheless left a cumulative impact on the fabric, morphology, and performance of the monument.

Early modifications largely followed the building's evolving institutional roles, beginning with its transformation after World War II when an addition was constructed on the eastern side. This extension sought to mimic the stylistic vocabulary of the original façade but ultimately disrupted the building's historic symmetry, producing long-term visual and structural consequences . During these mid-century interventions, interior walls, circulation patterns, and functional spaces were repeatedly adjusted to accommodate new administrative uses, contributing to the gradual loss of original interior spatial logic. The building later suffered from numerous ad-hoc interior alterations, many of which used incompatible or low-quality materials. The report notes that interior finishes were "poor quality during timely interventions," causing deterioration over time. For example, the non-original porcelain tiles installed on ground floors in a recent intervention were placed "in an unprofessional manner," as evidenced by uneven placement and inferior material performance.

Exterior elements also underwent unsympathetic changes. Additions such as exposed electrical cables, air-conditioning units, signage, and later railings altered the appearance of the façades and obscured original architectural features. In the yard, part of the historic fence was replaced with a wall, representing another uncoordinated modification inconsistent with the original design intent .

Roof-level interventions were similarly inconsistent. While the building still preserves its original Italian roof tiles, the roofing system accumulated degraded elements and partial repairs, leading to uneven performance and water-related deterioration. The dome structure on the front façade also suffered from aging materials and piecemeal maintenance, necessitating full restoration in the upcoming intervention program.

Plaster repairs on the façades represent another significant phase of past intervention. In many areas, damaged plaster had been replaced using mortars incompatible with the original material. The report records widespread plaster loss, cracks, and detachments, resulting from both material incompatibility and prior superficial repair efforts.

Overall, the building's deterioration is attributed not only to natural aging and the damage caused by the 2019 earthquake but also to the cumulative impact of uncoordinated and non-specialist interventions performed over decades. These included superficial repairs, unregulated additions, alterations of openings, and the use of non-compatible materials.

3. Condition Assessment (Pre-intervention)

3.1 National Puppet Theater

The National Puppet Theatre exhibited widespread deterioration across its structural system, interior elements, and exterior façades, resulting from a combination of age, poor-quality past interventions, and significant damage sustained during the 26 November 2019 earthquake.

Structural Condition

The building is classified as an unreinforced masonry structure with reinforced-concrete belts and elements, resting on stone masonry strip foundations. Visual inspections confirm no major structural cracks, but reveal problematic connections between floors, the timber roof, and masonry walls. Localised earthquake-related cracking, primarily in masonry areas, has been identified. The stage tower, a later addition with shallow foundations, was in severely depreciated condition and considered structurally vulnerable after the earthquake, necessitating full reconstruction to meet load-bearing requirements.

Photo Caption: Left: Fallen sections; Right: Stage section





Façade and Exterior Envelope Condition

The external façades showed extensive and cumulative deterioration. Moisture infiltration—linked to damaged roof coverings, failing gutters, and inadequate drainage—has caused biological growth, mold, plaster decay, detachment of decorative elements, and chromatic alteration across the exterior surfaces. Numerous non-original additions, including exposed wiring, air-conditioning units, advertising elements, non-historic shop tents, and later window replacements, disrupt the architectural integrity and historic character of the monument. Unprofessional terrace repairs using inappropriate materials (e.g., tar) have contributed to ongoing moisture problems.

Photo Caption: Up: Inappropriate additions and color; Bottom: Raising damp and damage









Photo Caption: Left: Rising damp; Right: Stage in a poor shape

Interior Condition

All interior materials display significant aging and cumulative degradation. Floors on the ground level were covered with non-original porcelain tiles installed "in an unprofessional manner," leading to uneven placement and poor durability. Upper floors presented a mixture of low-quality laminate and inconsistent tile finishes, not compatible with the building's architectural character. The wooden staircase suffered from advanced deterioration and required structural reinforcement.

In representational interior spaces—such as the auditorium, lodges, and ceremonial rooms—decorative stucco elements, ceiling moldings, and original wooden doors remain present, however somewhat hidden due to repeated layers of paint and inadequate maintenance. Subsequent openings of lodges, non-authentic doors, and improvised lighting fixtures further disrupt the building's historical coherence.

Additions, Alterations, and Later Interventions

Throughout the 20th century, the building underwent multiple functional adaptations, many executed with materials of poor quality and without regard for heritage standards. These include closure of loggias, replacement of historic windows, addition of incompatible partitions, and installation of low-grade finishing materials. These interventions, as documented, have resulted in heterogeneous materiality, weakened original elements, and accelerated deterioration of authentic features.

Overall Conservation Diagnosis

While the building retained its essential structural form and historical fabric, it suffered from:

- Systemic moisture infiltration
- Material degradation across all interior and exterior surfaces
- Accumulated low-quality repairs and intrusive alterations
- Earthquake-related structural vulnerabilities
- Severe deterioration of the stage tower
- Loss of aesthetic coherence and authenticity

Despite these issues, the building still embodied significant heritage value, with original masonry walls, decorative features, and historic spatial configuration which can be largely recoverable through carefully planned conservation interventions.

3.2 The Building of the Formerly Persecuted

The condition of the Building of the Formerly Persecuted prior to intervention reflected decades of cumulative deterioration, unregulated alterations, poor-quality maintenance interventions, and significant damage sustained during the 2019 earthquake. Although the monument retains its fundamental volumetry and architectural identity, the building suffered from widespread structural, material, and aesthetic degradation.

Structural Condition

The structural system—typical of early 20th-century masonry—consists of thick brick retaining walls combined with reinforced-concrete elements and wooden floors. The report confirms no major structural failures, but notes localised cracking in several interior walls attributable to the November 2019 earthquake, along with moisture-related deterioration in multiple areas. The connection points between wooden floors, timber roof elements, and masonry walls were problematic, indicating long-term weakening of joints and the need for consolidation. The structural stability of the later eastern addition was also of concern, given that its construction disrupted the original symmetry and introduced differing material behaviors.

Roof and Waterproofing

The roof was identified as one of the most critical areas of deterioration. Earthquake movement displaced roof tiles, allowing rainwater infiltration that had damaged the wooden roof structure, walls, ceilings, and interior floors. Some tiles are non-original, reflecting past ad-hoc repairs. Drainage and waterproofing layers were severely compromised: gutters were broken, downpipes installed incorrectly, and waterproofing tars on flat areas showed advanced decay. The parapet exhibited moisture damage due to missing or failed waterproofing layers. These defects created a continuous cycle of infiltration and decay.





Photo Caption: Top**:** Back side view with damaged roof, facade and finishes
Bottom: Roof conditions



Photo Caption: Facade damages

Façade Condition

The façades exhibited extensive deterioration resulting from both environmental exposure and decades of unregulated modifications. Damages included:

- Damaged plaster and widespread detachments
- Chromatic alteration from pollution and moisture
- Biological patina, mold, and efflorescence
- Loss or damage of decorative elements such as frames, balusters, and molded motifs

In addition, successive non-historic interventions—including visible electrical wiring, AC units, signage, railings, non-original chimneys, external lighting fixtures, and later aluminium windows—have severely compromised the monument's architectural integrity. The southern façade has been particularly altered through the closure of original loggias, replacement of openings, and unprofessional repairs.

Interior Condition

The interior presented widespread material degradation. Floors on the ground level were covered with non-original porcelain tiles of low quality, poorly installed, and showing visible unevenness. Upper floors combined degraded laminate, mismatched tile finishes, and exposed, damaged wooden substrates. The main wooden staircase was heavily deteriorated and structurally weakened, requiring full reinforcement. Ceilings on both floors showed serious problems: the ground-floor ceilings consisted of non-original plastic panels and plasterboard, while first-floor ceilings have collapsed in sections due to moisture and the weight of accumulated inert material in the roof void.





Photo Caption: Left: Attic space; Right: Groundfloor areas

Moisture-Related Damage

Moisture was identified as a primary agent of deterioration, affecting walls, ceilings, floors, and decorative elements. Visual evidence showed rising damp, plaster detachment, stains, and mold growth across multiple interior rooms. These issues were directly linked to roof failure, damaged gutters, deficient waterproofing, and previous low-quality repairs.

External Environment and Site Elements

The courtyard paving, dating to the original construction, was largely intact, but it showed surface unevenness, chromatic alteration, and localised deterioration from moisture and later interventions. The surrounding fence was partially original; however, a section has been replaced with an incompatible wall, further diminishing the authenticity of the external setting.

Overall Conservation Diagnosis

Overall, the building was in a moderate to poor state of conservation, with urgent needs in the roof, façades, interior finishes, and structural connections. The most severe vulnerabilities stemmed from moisture infiltration, earthquake-related cracking, unprofessional past interventions, and material incompatibility. Despite this degradation, the structure still retained significant original fabric and was fully recoverable through specialised, research-driven conservation intervention.

4. Conservation Philosophy and Approach

4.1 Theoretical Framework

The conservation of early 20th-century designed architecture—such as the National Puppet Theater (First Albanian Parliament) and the Building of the Formerly Persecuted—requires a careful balance between preserving historic identity and ensuring continued functional use. Although these buildings are considered historic monuments, they are constructed with materials similar to those used today, increasing the risk of over-restoration if modern interventions are not carefully controlled.
The project was therefore guided by a values-based conservation approach, grounded in international conservation theory and aligned with national legislation for Category I and Category II monuments.

Authenticity

Authenticity was approached through the material, design, workmanship, setting, and historical use of both buildings. The aim was to preserve the historic stratigraphy—including original 1920s construction, interwar modifications, post-war transformations, and later political-era additions—so that the buildings continue to represent their layered histories.

Minimal Intervention

Following the Venice Charter (1964) and ICOMOS Principles, interventions were limited to what was strictly necessary to ensure structural stability, material conservation, and safe contemporary use. Entire reconstruction was avoided except where material loss or earthquake damage rendered original elements non-recoverable (e.g., the structurally compromised stage tower of the National Puppet Theater).

Reversibility and Retreatability

Where possible, materials and techniques were chosen to be reversible (e.g., surface treatments, protective coatings) or retreatable (e.g., lime-based mortars instead of cementitious mixes). This ensures that future interventions may upgrade or correct present methods without causing loss to the authentic fabric.

Compatibility

All new materials—including mortars, plasters, tiles, structural reinforcements, and mechanical systems—were selected for chemical, physical, and visual compatibility with the original fabric. This principle was crucial given the risk that modern materials may visually dominate or structurally overpower early 20th-century architectural components.

Legibility

New additions (mechanical systems, HVAC components, structural strengthening) were integrated in a manner that is visually discreet, ensuring that historic elements remain clearly distinguishable from modern interventions, without compromising the building's functional requirements.

4.2 Ethical Considerations

The conservation philosophy followed the core ethical frameworks of:

- UNESCO Recommendations: The safeguarding of cultural heritage as a public good, ensuring transmission of cultural significance to future generations. In this context, both buildings were treated as irreplaceable witnesses of Albania's political, social, and architectural history.
- ICOMOS Charters: The following ICOMOS documents informed the ethical approach: The Venice Charter (1964) – guidance on authenticity, minimal intervention, and conservation over reconstruction; Burra Charter (2013) – values-based significance assessment and decision-making; Principles for the Preservation of Historic Timber Structures – relevant for roof and floor rehabilitation; Principles for the Analysis, Conservation and Structural Restoration of Architectural Heritage (2003) – informing seismic consolidation strategies.
- National Heritage Legislation: For the National Puppet Theater (Category I), ethical requirements prohibited internal or external changes not directly related to stabilisation or conservation. For the Building of the Formerly Persecuted (Category II), internal adaptations were ethically permissible but had to respect the original layout of representative spaces and preserve the building's external volumetry and façade identity.

4.3 Criteria for Decision-Making

Decision-making followed a structured, multi-layered process:

Significance Assessment

Interventions were prioritised according to the cultural, architectural, historical, and symbolic values of each element:

- High value: original 1920s masonry, façades, decorative plaster, timber staircase, historic openings, courtyard pavements.
- Medium value: later but historically important alterations (interwar modifications, socialist-era elements).
- Low value: intrusive additions such as aluminium frames, non-original tiles, electrical cables, AC units.

Condition Assessment

Diagnostic findings (structural analysis, moisture mapping, material testing) defined the level of intervention required—from stabilisation to conservation to reconstruction.

- Risk of Loss
- Elements that risked imminent loss (structurally unstable roofs, moisture-damaged ceilings, deteriorated timber elements, failed waterproofing) received priority.
- Functional Requirements
- Given the intended future uses (theater and office space), decisions balanced conservation needs with functional, safety, and accessibility requirements.
- Regulatory Requirements
- National regulations for Category I and Category II monuments established strict limits on permissible alterations and guided the selection of conservation methods.

4.4 Risk Assessment and Prioritisation

A comprehensive risk assessment identified the following primary risks affecting both monuments:

Structural Risks:

- Earthquake-induced cracking in masonry walls.
- Weak floor-to-wall and roof-to-wall connections.
- Structural instability of later additions (e.g., the stage tower).
- Decaying timber elements susceptible to collapse.

Moisture Risks

- Failed roof waterproofing, broken gutters, and inadequate drainage created persistent infiltration.
- Rising damp and condensation contributed to plaster loss, biological growth, and material decay.
- Moisture-related ceiling collapses in several rooms.

Material Risks

- Loss of decorative features (balusters, plaster reliefs, cornices).
- Degradation caused by incompatible modern materials used in previous repairs.
- Deterioration of wooden elements from insects, fungi, or moisture.

Visual and Architectural Risks

- Loss of architectural integrity due to non-historic additions.
- Visual noise from cables, AC units, signage, and window replacements.
- Declining legibility of façades from chromatic alteration and plaster detachment.

Operational Risks

- Non-compliance of mechanical and electrical systems with safety standards.
- Absence of adequate fire protection, emergency routes, and accessibility provisions.

4.4.1 Prioritisation Strategy

Risk prioritisation followed the sequence:

1. Life-safety interventions (seismic stabilisation, unsafe ceilings, structural reinforcement).
2. Waterproofing and moisture control (roof repair, drainage restoration, façade consolidation).
3. Material conservation (plaster consolidation, timber repair, decorative restoration).
4. Reversing harmful interventions (removal of incompatible materials, reopening of historic features).
5. Integration of new systems (HVAC, electrical, fire protection, accessibility).

This strategy ensured that the most urgent conservation needs were addressed first, while safeguarding long-term preservation values.

5. Conservation Interventions

The conservation and rehabilitation of the National Puppet Theater (former First Albanian Parliament) and the Building of the Formerly Persecuted involved a wide range of architectural, structural, material, and systems-based interventions. These were required due to accumulated deterioration, repeated non-specialist alterations, and the significant impact of the 2019 earthquake.

5.1 National Puppet Theater

5.1.1 Preliminary Works and Site Preparation

Interventions began with the installation of scaffolding around the façades and the preparation of the construction site, allowing safe access to all building levels and ensuring controlled removal of deteriorated materials.

5.1.2 Removal of Non-Original and Deteriorated Elements

Much of the prior damage stemmed from decades of inappropriate internal and external modifications. Thus, the project included systematic removal of:

- Incompatible flooring layers
- Damaged roof materials
- Deteriorated interior plaster
- Outdated and unsafe electrical and hydraulic installations
- Inappropriate additions such as wiring, AC units, shop tents, and ad-hoc enclosures.

5.1.3 Structural Consolidation and Seismic Improvements

Following the earthquake, structural reinforcement was a core priority. Measures included:

- Consolidation of load-bearing masonry walls
- Repair of earthquake-related cracking
- Strengthening connections between floors, roof structures, and structural belt,
- Reconstruction of the stage tower, which exhibited severe damage due to shallow foundations and required full redesign to meet stability standards.

5.1.4 Roof Repairs and Weatherproofing

The roof systems of both buildings were extensively repaired. Works included:

- Replacement of degraded timber elements with exact same type and dimension of members
- Restoration or substitution of roof tiles (including original Italian tiles where preserved)
- Installation of proper thermal and water insulation
- Repair of chimneys and drainage systems to prevent moisture infiltration—one of the primary causes of façade and interior damage.

5.1.5 Façade Restoration and Material Conservation

The project restored façade integrity by addressing:

- Detached or deteriorated plaster
- Surface cracking and moisture damage
- Non-original mortar layers replaced in earlier superficial repairs
  Restoration followed conservation principles by employing compatible materials replicating original plaster textures, and removing visual pollution such as exposed cables and incompatible elements that had compromised historical authenticity.

5.1.6 Establishing the correct color code for final outlook (Exterior)

The historical chronology of transformation of the building originally built in 1924 include transformations of the building in following major phases:

- the transformation of the 1930s - including several changes to the roof (type of cover, removal of the domed roof), change in typology of windows, entrance to gallery areas and similar. While some of the physical features of the buildings were changed, the building retained the functions of assembly
- the transformation of the 1950s - when the building underwent additional changes including removal of partition walls in interiors, addition of the volume for the extended stage and addition of volumes on both sides of the building. The building also changed its function from the building which purely hosts assembly to a building which would host a stage for theatrical performances. (Puppet Theater)
- The transformations in the last years include ad-hoc transformations which resulted from the needs of the existing function of the building.

During all phases of transformation, the building would receive a new facade coating. This resulted in a number of layers of plaster and paint, especially observed in the front facade of the building.

The architectural conservation of the building has attempted to find a stylistic compromise regarding the original volume of the building, and the 2 major historical transformations, the one of 1930s and the one of 1950s. This meant that, in the main volume of preserved Parliament volumes, the conservation is aimed to retain as much as possible of the historical transformations of the 1930s (domed roof is not reconstructed, windows are pertaining to the phase of 1930 and the roof cover is restored to the same period). On the other hand, the added volumes for the function of Puppet Theater are as well retained. Given this compromise of conservation decisions, the main architectural volume retained is that of the expanded building in the 1950s with some characteristics of the 1930s (in the central volumes). The analogy of such a compromise indicated that the decision of facade coating should be in line with the last transformation of value (1950s).

In that respect and from the on-site analysis, we can assume :

- Layer 1 - ochre - first color coating of 1924 (as confirmed with remaining layers of paint at the back of the building and on the parapet of the balcony)
- Layer 2 - caput mortuum with titanium white (dirty pink) - color coating of 1930
- Layer 3 - caput mortuum with titanium white (dirty pink) - color coating of 1950
- Layer 4 - ochre - color coating of 1960s

The color in Layer 1 was applied to a coarse and not finely plastered surface

5.1.7 Establishing the correct color code for final outlook (Interior)

The historical chronology of transformation of the building originally built in 1924 include transformations of the building in following major phases

- the transformation of the 1930s - including several changes in interior including removal of the entrance door to the side, exclusive entrance to the galleries, removal of relief decorations representing Albanian coat of arm

- the transformation of the 1950s - when offices were opened to serve long corridors, and with addition of stage the galleries close to stage were opened to serve the communication and similar

While transformations of the interior of the building were significant, the transformations of the auditorium were not as severe. The auditorium to this day is kept within the same volume of internal elevations including aforementioned changes.

From the test pits in the interior, it was concluded that only one color layer was present, that one of the bright red color. However, examining the colour codes over the years, it can be concluded that the current red colouring is of more recent date, while the interior of the auditorium was initially colored in two shades of white.

In that respect and from the on-site analysis, we can assume:

Layer 1 – lime wash (possibly thickened with titanium white) with tin gray for shaded portions - first color coating of 1924 (as confirmed with remaining layers of paint at the back of the building and on the parapet of the balcony)
Layer 2 – somewhat darker or dirty additional layer over the first coating
Layer 3 - light green layer of 1998

Conclusion:

Exterior - Given the elements of 1930s of architectural features and the compromise with volume extensions of Puppet Theater, either Ochre or caput mortuum with titanium white (dirty pink) could be applied - however the recommended coating would be ochre since the main features, including the balcony, would be left in their original color, since they are exposed now to retain the color of 1930.

Interior - lime wash (possibly thickened with titanium white) with tin gray for shaded portions - since the auditorium is retained in its form of 1924.

5.1.8 Interior Restoration

Works covered:

- Full rehabilitation of rooms, toilets, doors, windows, stairs, and floors
- Restoration of original carpentry where preserved and the reproduction of elements when missing
- Reinstating historic spatial legibility disrupted by past ad-hoc modifications
- Reproduction of original tiles in the main hall following historic photographic documentation.

5.1.9 Mechanical, Electrical, and Plumbing (MEP) Systems

New systems were installed to ensure functional and code-compliant operation:

- HVAC, firefighting systems, water supply and sewage, rainwater drainage, and complete electrical rewiring
- Fire detection, CCTV, LAN networks, lighting, grounding systems, and digital infrastructure
- Installation of accessibility and emergency exit components including anti-panic door handles.

5.1.10 Stage Technology and Theatre-Specific Installations

For the National Puppet Theater, specialised stage infrastructure was modernised, including:

- Fire curtain mechanisms
- Stage lifts and machinery
- Orchestra lift
- Audio systems, textiles, seating arrangements, and projection technology.

5.1.11 Restoration of Doors and Windows

The project included:

- Restoration of original doors and primary entrance gates
- Replacement of non-original frames with historically accurate wooden elements
- Adjusting openings that had been previously closed or altered by inappropriate interventions.

5.2 The Building of Formerly Persecuted

5.2.1 Preliminary Works and Site Preparation

Interventions began with the installation of scaffolding around the façades and the preparation of the construction site, allowing safe access to all building levels and ensuring controlled removal of deteriorated materials.

5.2.2 Removal of Inappropriate / Non-Authentic Elements

The intervention included the systematic removal of all items that were added over time and did not belong to the original architectural character. This included non-authentic ceramic and porcelain tiles, aluminum windows and doors, added walls, air-conditioning devices, metallic chimneys, and shop-related signage or tents.

5.2.3 Restoration of Plaster, Wall Surfaces, and Decorative Elements

Damaged, decayed, or inappropriate plaster layers were removed, and new plastering compatible with original material was applied. Walls were repainted in accordance with approved conservation colors. Architectural decorations are cleaned using soft metallic brushes and repainted for preservation. Missing decorations are reconstructed following the original models, clearly identifiable to differentiate past and new interventions.

5.2.4 Restoration of Windows and Doors

Non-authentic windows are replaced with new units produced according to the original historical design. Damaged wooden doors are restored or repainted appropriately where original finishes were altered.

5.2.5 Roof Restoration and Structural Improvements

The roof structure underwent full restoration, including reinforcement of deteriorated timber elements and replacement of damaged tiles with identical replicas. Original reusable tiles were washed and reinstated. Chimney walls were restored, and the chimney crown was reconstructed according to historical documentation. Drainage components—gutters and downpipes—were replaced to ensure proper functioning.

5.2.6 Terrace and Parapet Rehabilitation

Terraces received new leveling layers and waterproofing membranes. Parapets were restored and covered with copper caps to protect against moisture infiltration and degradation.

5.2.7 Structural Consolidation of Earthquake-Affected Elements

Interior and exterior cracks caused by past seismic activity were repaired. Timber floors, slabs, and stair structures showing decay, deformation, or insect damage were reinforced or damaged members were replaced where necessary.

5.2.8 Removal of Vegetation and Biological Growth

Uncontrolled vegetation growth, biological patina, mold, and moisture-related discoloration were cleaned and treated to halt further deterioration of façade and structural surfaces.

5.2.9 Improvement of Drainage and Moisture Protection

Damaged gutters were replaced; improper water drainage systems were corrected. Moisture-affected areas such as timber beams, gypsum ceilings, and concrete parapets were repaired following drying and treatment protocols.

5.3 Conservation Documentation and Compliance

All works were conducted in alignment with conservation standards, documenting each intervention to ensure traceability and adherence to cultural monument regulations. Materials were chosen to match original composition or ensure compatibility where originals were absent.

6. Results and Outcomes

6.1 National Puppet Theater



Before (Exterior)

After (Exterior)





Before (Interior)

After (Interior)



6.2 The Building of the Formerly Persecuted



Before (Exterior)

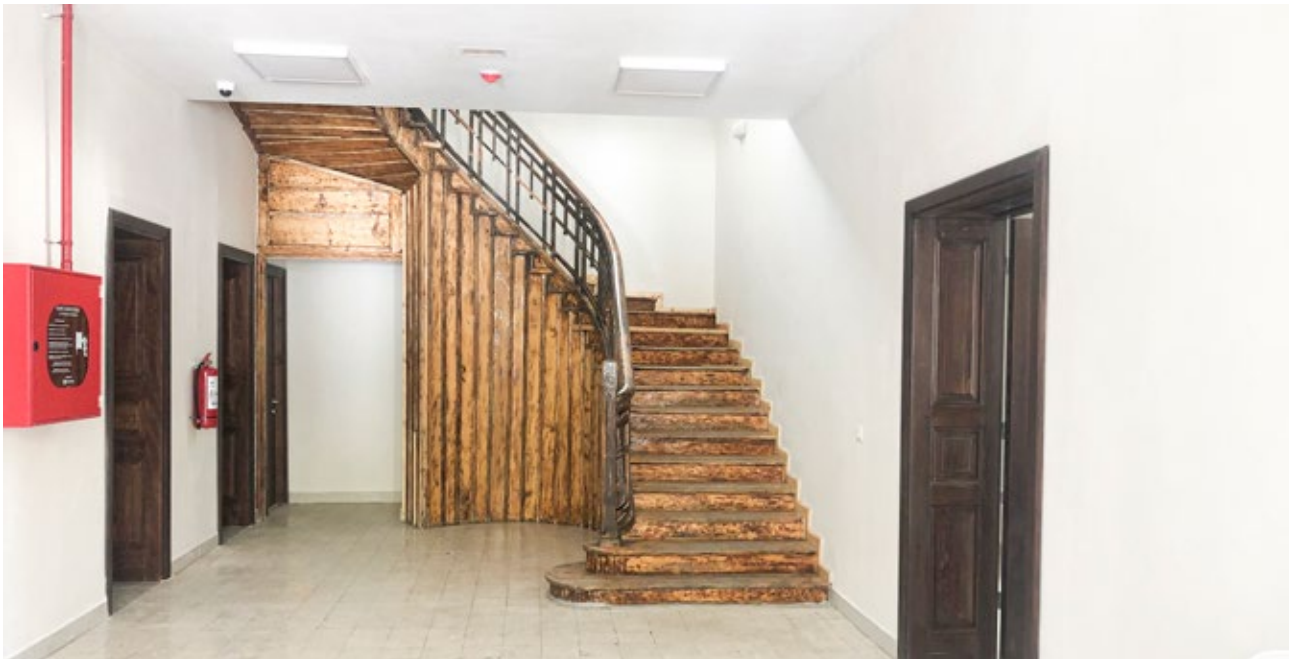
After (Exterior)





Before (Interior)

After (Interior)



6.3 Challenges encountered during intervention

While the conservation of the Building of the Formerly Persecuted was relatively smooth, if not taking into account some of the aspects related to the management of the asset, the National Puppet Theater conservation yielded some challenges:

- The actual condition of the structure differed from what was outlined in the conservation design. The design assumed the foundations were made of concrete; however, upon excavation, it was revealed that they were constructed of stone. This discrepancy necessitated a complete revision and re-approval of the structural consolidation proposal.
- The proposed structural consolidation using carbon fibers was initially planned for the interior elevations of the auditorium, which would have caused irreversible damage to the historical elements of the interior. To preserve these features, the consolidation design was reworked to eliminate interventions of such scale on the interior elevations.
- Extended time required to finalise the stage elements and equipment specifications caused delays in placing orders, which subsequently led to delays in delivery.

6.4 Unexpected findings

6.4.1 National Puppet Theater

Once the ceramic flooring was removed at the entrance hall of the Theater, the original tiling from 1924 was discovered. The condition of the tiling was solid and required only cleaning.

Inside the auditorium, after the cement layers were removed, the original steps leading into the auditorium space were discovered. The final restoration of the auditorium floor took this into account and levelled the flooring to match the original floor level from the period when the building was used as the first Albanian Parliament.

6.4.2 The Building of Formerly Persecuted

Once the ceramic flooring was removed in the entrance hall, the original terrazzo floor was discovered. The floor was slightly damaged. After local repairs, it was left as found.



Photo Caption: Original tiles of National Puppet Theater



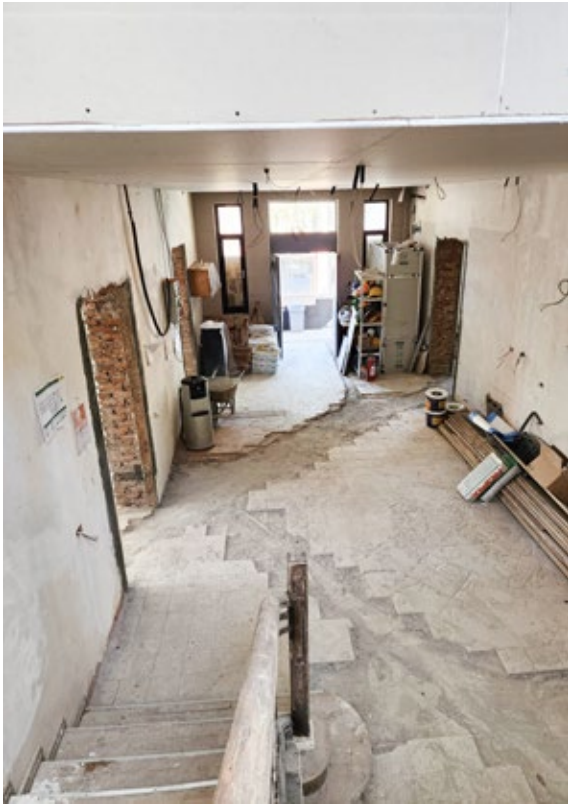


Photo Caption:

Left: Original floor level of National Puppet Theater

Right: Uncovered terrazzo floor of The Building of Formerly Persecuted

7. Maintenance and Monitoring Plan

Towards the end of the conservation interventions at the National Puppet Theater and the Building of the Formerly Persecuted, UNOPS produced maintenance manuals for both assets. The manuals define daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal, and annual maintenance cycles for various categories of interventions.

7.1 National Puppet Theater

Daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal, and annual maintenance cycles include:

- Painting Works – includes an annual cycle using hydromat paint and the necessary tools and equipment
- Drainage and Water Disposal Systems – cleaning and inspection after periods of heavy rainfall and during the autumn season
- Roof Maintenance – seasonal inspections after heavy rains, including repair or replacement of tiles and surface cleaning
- Historic Building Structure (The part of the building besides the stage) – annual inspections should be carried out
- Stage Area – annual maintenance and inspection.
- Emergency Maintenance
- The manual specifies targeted actions to be carried out after particular emergency events:
- After Earthquakes: inspection of GFRP(Glass Fibre Reinforced Polymer)-to-masonry junctions and verification of timber roof trusses
- After Fires: checking and replacing damaged fire detectors, inspecting portable fire extinguishers, refilling them annually, and replacing units with mechanical damage
- After Heavy Rainfall: cleaning the entire drainage system, including gutters, down-pipes, and inspection manholes
- After Strong Winds: checking the roof for displaced tiles or detached sheet metal components.

The manual emphasises that the maintenance document itself must be reviewed periodically, especially after emergency events that may alter the structural condition of the monument. Periodic updates ensure that the maintenance strategy remains accurate, effective, and aligned with the building's evolving conservation needs.

7.2 The Building of Formerly Persecuted

7.2.1 Daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal, and annual maintenance cycles including:

- Inspect roof tiles and replace damaged elements
- Test fire extinguishers, fire alarm systems, and hydrants
- Ensure emergency evacuation plans are posted in visible locations
- Inspect accessible interior roof structure for deterioration
- Inspect roof boarding (petavra) and waterproofing layers
- Check entire façade for signs of cracking or deterioration
- Inspect wooden floors and staircases for damage and repair as needed
- Clean and repaint the entire façade; perform small surface repairs as required

7.2.2 Emergency Maintenance

The manual identifies specific procedures following major events:

- After an Earthquake: Immediate inspection of roof timber, waterproofing layers, masonry walls, wooden stairs, terrace structures, and the roof of the newly added space. Specialists should be engaged if damage is observed
- After a Fire: Assessment of fire impact is critical due to combustible materials (wooden roof, floors, stairs, windows, and doors). Specialist teams must design restoration solutions if damage occurs
- After Heavy Rain: Inspection of the attic for water infiltration and indoor spaces beneath the terrace for leakage
- After Strong Winds:Check terrace drainage outlets, roof gutters, roof tiles, and façade doors/windows. Evaluate potential damage from fallen trees in the courtyard.

The manual stresses the necessity of periodically reviewing and updating the maintenance document itself. Revisions must be undertaken especially after emergency events, ensuring that the building's preservation strategy remains accurate and responsive to any structural or environmental changes.


TEATRI I
KUKULLAVE




TEATRI I
KUKULLAVE
Restaurimi i Teatrit Kombëtar të Kukullave
Restoration of the National Puppet Theater

8. Project Management

UNOPS (United Nations Office for Project Services) applied a unified, structured project management approach for the conservation and restoration of the National Puppet Theater and the Building of the Formerly Persecuted, both implemented under the EU4Culture programme. Despite the different histories, conditions, and functions of the two monuments, UNOPS followed a consistent methodology designed to ensure quality, transparency, risk control, and long-term sustainability.

8.1 Condition assessment and conservation scope

For both buildings, UNOPS began by conducting:

- Technical assessment and Documentation
- Preliminary condition assessment
- Development of conservation scope

8.2 Stakeholder Coordination

- Collaboration with the Regional Directorate of National Cultural Heritage
- Engagement with users and state institutions operating inside each building
- Alignment with national heritage legislation and EU cultural preservation standards

8.3 Design Development and Technical Preparation

Throughout the duration of implementation of EU4Culture programme, UNOPS was supported by an external licenced conservation design team for the development of the conservation designs.

The conservation designs were controlled and coordinated by the UNOPS infrastructure and cultural heritage team, which closely controlled all the portions of design.

Compliance and Approval Process

- Reviews by UNOPS - Once designs were controlled by the internal UNOPS team, and were defined as ready, they were sent for additional control by UNOPS Infrastructure and Project Management Group (IPMG). Only after designs were revised and IPMG certificate was issued, the designs were considered finalised.

- Reviews by heritage authorities - As per the Albanian legislation, once conservation designs are finalised they are submitted for approval to the National Scientific Council at the National Institute for Cultural Heritage. If the Scientific Council does not have any comments, the designs are forwarded to the National Council of Material Heritage. Once approved and respective conservation permits are received, the design can be procured for implementation. Important to note is that if during implementation changes arise, designs need to be revised and re-sent for approval.
- Incorporation of safety, fire-protection, and energy-efficiency measures

8.4 Procurement and Contractor Management

Once designs were equipped with all respective permits, UNOPS ensured transparent, competitive procurement, including:

- Selection of qualified contractors licensed for conservation of heritage assets
- Procurement followed UNOPS global procurement rules, ensuring integrity and value.

8.5 Oversight of implementation of works and quality assurance

During the implementation of works, UNOPS provided:

- On-site supervision on behalf of UNOPS, which meant that at least one associate civil engineer employed by UNOPS was daily on the site, monitoring progress, quality and controlling environmental, health and safety requirements. An important role for UNOPS engineers was risk management, where engineers were tasked with filing daily and weekly health and safety reports, risk assessment reports, and daily logs.

- Third party supervision - an external licensed supervision company was hired to support UNOPS in controlling implementation, certification of quality, implemented volumes, etc, throughout the duration of the works. This was important, especially since the National Institute for Cultural Heritage which initially provided this support, was lacking capacity specifically in areas of structural, mechanical and electrical engineering.

- Highly important was a follow up on all conservation measures which was done by UNOPS cultural heritage adviser regularly

8.5.1 Health and Safety

UNOPS applies a rigorous Health and Safety Management system designed to ensure that all restoration and construction activities are carried out with maximum protection for workers, visitors, and the surrounding community. This system is grounded in international HSE standards and includes comprehensive risk assessments, method statements, and safety protocols developed prior to the start of any work. On-site supervision ensures strict adherence to protective measures such as the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), scaffolding safety, fall-prevention systems, controlled access zones, and fire-prevention procedures—especially critical in heritage buildings containing combustible materials. UNOPS continuously monitors worksites, conducts safety briefings and toolbox talks, documents incidents, and enforces corrective actions to prevent reoccurrence. Through this structured approach, UNOPS maintains a safe working environment while safeguarding the integrity of cultural monuments and the well-being of everyone involved.

During the implementation of works, infrastructure project manager, lead construction management engineer and civil engineer were tasked with daily coordination and support as to ensure all the health and safety Measurements are met.

Furthermore and to increase the capacity of local contractors, regular tool box talks and training when it comes to risk management, health and safety and daily operations of conservation sites.

8.5.2 Documenting and reporting

UNOPS follows a rigorous documenting during implementation. Documentation is done through following:

- Shared digital drive-based documentation system, where all data regarding the design, contract, meetings, reporting, daily photo documentation, are stored and available to the engineering team
- The documentation as well includes all segments related to environmental management, risk management, HSSE management, logs and inspections.
- Reporting as well is done on several levels:
- Initially biweekly, and later monthly reporting to donor
- Biweekly detailed progress reporting to donor and beneficiary
- Regular technical and coordination meetings with both donor, beneficiary, asset managers and similar
- Reporting in UNOPS field data collection platform (UNOPScollect system) where daily logs, daily and weekly HSSE reports are collected

8.6 Testing, Commissioning, and Hand-Over

Prior to final completion is declared by the contractor, together with supervisor UNOPS checks:

- The functionality of new MEP (Mechanical, Electrical, and Plumbing) systems: electrical panels, fire alarms, UPS, HVAC, CCTV, generators
- Structural integrity and stability
- Quality of surface finishes, floors, roofs, and restored façade elements
- Compliance with fire and building safety standards

Once all remarks have been addressed by the contractor, the works are subject to inspection. UNOPS, together with the contractor, supervisor, the National Institute for Cultural Heritage, the relevant Regional Directorate of National Culture, the site beneficiary, and the site manager, jointly conduct the site inspection.In parallel, and following the final supervisor's approval, all project documentation is handed over to a commission, which issues the Commissioning Act. Once the Commissioning Act is issued, the site is provisionally handed over to the beneficiary. This moment also marks the start of the Defects Notification Period (DNP). The DNP for all sites restored under EU4Culture was 12 months, with the exception of one site, which was an emergency stabilisation and did not require a DNP due to the temporary nature of the intervention.

8.7 Final Hand-Over

During the DNP period, UNOPS conducts periodic inspections and coordinates between the beneficiary and the contractor in the event of any defects. At the end of the 12-month period, a final inspection is carried out. If there are no remarks, the final handover certificate is signed by all parties, marking the full completion of the works by UNOPS.

8.8 Overall Added Value of UNOPS Project Management

By applying its globally recognised project-management system, UNOPS ensured that both buildings benefited from:

- Transparency and international procurement standards
- High-quality heritage-compatible restoration
- Strong safety and risk mitigation
- Efficient use of EU4Culture funds
- Sustainable long-term maintenance frameworks

- Enhanced functionality while respecting historical authenticity
- Capacity building and knowledge transfer to national and local stakeholders
- Engagement of academic institutions and students through on-site learning opportunities
- Promotion of inclusive participation, including gender-balanced involvement of experts and professionals

UNOPS delivered projects that not only restored important cultural buildings but also strengthened institutional capacity for ongoing stewardship.

9. Acknowledgments

EU4Culture gratefully acknowledges the support, collaboration and technical contribution of all institutions and teams involved in the implementation of the intervention, including the European Union Delegation in Albania, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, the National Institute for Cultural Heritage, the Institute for Research of Crimes of Communism, the Institute for the Formerly Persecuted, the National Centre for Children in Tirana, and UNOPS, through its infrastructure, cultural heritage, procurement, support services and programme management teams.

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