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Finnish organizations urge the European Union to investigate destruction of cultural and architectural treasures in Turku, a European Capital of Culture 2011 host

Alarmed and concerned by the destruction of cultural and architectural treasures in Turku, which is one of the current hosts of the European Capital of Culture 2011, three Finnish organizations have contacted the EU Commission in Brussels to register their concerns.

The three organizations have been particularly disturbed by the demolition of an art nouveau building dating back from 1902 and an art deco warehouse built in 1911, all this in spite of strong protests from cultural organizations, architects, local politicians and national media outlets.

”It is very important that the independent EU panel, which has chosen Turku and Tallinn as cultural capitals for 2011 should be objectively informed about the cultural destruction that is going on in Turku. In the light of this background, we urge the European Union to investigate if Turku is living up to its commitments as a European Capital of Culture 2011 host,” says Pauliina de Anna, Chairperson of a civic organization called Our Turku (*Meidän Turku in Finnish and Vårt Åbo in Swedish*).

The demolition of the art nouveau building last week was the culmination of a seven year legal battle to protect the building, which has been classified as an architectural and historical monument by the Museum of Turku and prominent architects.

According to the Finnish NGO, which has filed a complaint to the European Union, the destruction of the historical buildings is just a tip of the iceberg. Turku, the organization maintains, wants to raze several architectural treasures from the 800-year-old city.

Historical buildings earmarked for demolition include a wooden empire style building dating back from 1831, several unique wooden structures from the 1850s, and a hostel built in 1827 and designed by the renowned Finnish architect, Carl Ludvig Engel, who masterminded the impressive layout and plan of the magnificent Senate Square in Helsinki.

The degradation of Turku’s cultural and architectural heritage starts from the shadows of the iconic medieval Church Dome, where, just a stone throw away, the famous Pinella Restaurant has been waiting for renovation for the last seven years. The restaurant was opened by Nils Henrik Pinello in 1848, and has been frequented by Finnish historical notables such as the writers Johan Ludvig Runeberg and Elias Lönnrot.

In the 1960s and 1970s Turku gained notoriety for demolishing several historical buildings in the city centre to create a “modern” city. What subsequently became known as the “Turku disease” has resurfaced again.

”According to the EU criteria for granting the European Capital of Culture status, the applicant city should highlight the richness of cultural diversity in Europe and facilitate sustainable long-term

cultural and social development of the city. We find it hard to understand how the recent cultural degradation in Turku can fulfil that criteria”, says Mikael Sjövall, a Turku activist.

Download pictures showing the demolition of the 109-year-old Art Nouveau building in Turku from here: http://www.koivuharju.fi/puujatalo/wikestrom_press.htm

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More additional information(pictures):

http://www.koivuharju.fi/puujatalo/wikestrom_press.htm

<http://www.meidanturku.gofreeserve.com/sinisentalonpurku.php>