

DOCOMOMO Russia Statement

Members of the Russian branch of DOCOMOMO (*International committee for documentation and conservation of buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the modern movement*) with concern and close attention are following the situation around the monument of world importance – the house-studio of Konstantin Melnikov (1927-1929). Acknowledging the steps of the state to preserve this outstanding work of architecture and its memorial context related to the life and work of Konstantin and Viktor Melnikov, we, architectural historians of the twentieth century, experts on the cultural heritage of this period, express an objection to the forceful methods and aggressive media campaigns that were taken in August 2014 in order to "start the museumification" of this monument.

Aware of the complexity of the protracted litigation in deciding the fate of the Melnikov House, which is inhibiting the restoration of the monument and the creation of the museum, however, we would like to emphasize that in late 2013 the main legal issues were resolved on the basis of reaching an agreement between the parties (the heirs and the state). The actual implementation of these decisions, expected by 2015, would allow for the creation of a state museum in the house-studio to begin within a legal framework, based on the will of the artist Viktor Melnikov, the guardian of the house since the death of his father, a prominent architect. The state only then, along with the execution of a number of obligations, can become the fully legitimate owner of the house. Recall that at the moment the right only to real estate in the form of 1/2 of the house is fully transferred to the state represented by the Federal Agency for State Property Management.

Events around the Melnikov House occurring from 13 August 2014 to the present day have shown that ignoring the legal side of the issue has led to a sharp escalation of the situation. The Shchusev State Museum of Architecture has committed misconduct with the use of force, exceeding their authority in relation to the executor of the will Ekaterina Karinskaya, granddaughter of the architect, and in relation to the monument itself. The ethical aspect of what is happening is absolutely incompatible with the field of culture and impermissible for a museum as an institution, being an educator, and guardian of memory and precious evidence of the past.

It should be emphasized that recent events indicate a failure in the negotiation process and the absence of agreement between parties, without which the next steps in the rescue and restoration of a unique Russian avant-garde monument, or the creation of a museum, are impossible. Only respect for the heritage of Konstantin Melnikov and his family will allow the current impasse to be overcome. A conflict situation should be resolved without any application of force, and only by finding a consensus. Experts around the world are closely following the situation.

Members of the Russian branch of DOCOMOMO insist on the following:

1. On the immediate halt to the operation of force on the territory of a cultural heritage site of federal significance, the house-studio of Konstantin Melnikov, conducted with the participation of a private security firm, as well as other wrongful moves against Ekaterina Viktorovna Karinskaya. The inventory being conducted by the Shchusev State Museum of Architecture of the house's movable property and other similar activities can be resumed only after the entry into force of inheritance rights;
2. To request the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation to create a conciliation commission with the participation of the parties involved in the conflict, with the involvement of experts on the heritage of Konstantin Melnikov, the preservation of cultural heritage and museum affairs, DOCOMOMO and cultural societies (Archnadzor social movement, MAPS), as well as the engineers from the Russian Academy of Architecture and Construction Sciences (RAASN) who examined the territory and the foundations of the house-studio in 2014. Bearing in mind the outstanding international importance of the Melnikov House, involve in the conciliation commission the Russian Committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM);
3. To overcome the current crisis as soon as possible, request the Shchusev State Museum of Architecture to develop and present for review by experts and the public a detailed concept of the future museum of Konstantin and Viktor Melnikov (within the scope of implementing the will of Viktor Melnikov) with sources of its funding, as well as a plan for the restoration of the monument of federal significance. **Approval of the concept, announcement of the date and mode of access of visitors to the house-studio should be preceded by an independent examination of its technical condition and the corresponding prevention and restoration work.**