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<b>Uw ref</b>	:	---

*English translation of the letter sent on April 30th by the Flemish Association for Industrial Archaeology to the Heritage Department of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern*

Dear Dr. Bednorz,

I am writing to you in my quality as Chairman of the Flemish Association for Industrial Archaeology (V.V.A.) – the Flemish platform of associations and volunteers for the study, the research and the preservation of industrial and technical heritage.

Our Association was founded in 1978 and is therefore the oldest Association for Industrial Archeology operating nationwide on the European continent. Over the years our Association has gained a lot of expertise in setting up and managing/guiding heritage projects. Personally, I am also General Secretary of E-FAITH (Europäisches Erhalt des Industriellen und Vereinigungen zum Technischen Related des Erbes) and an active member of the Royal Monuments and Sites Commission.

Both our Association and more particularly I, myself, are very troubled by the occurrences related to the "Georg Büchner" in Rostock, the last surviving Congo vessel 'Charlesville', which was the covenant in the regular line between Antwerp with Matadi, and presumably also the very last mixed cargo-passenger liner in the world. The probable lifting of the Heritage protection and to subsequently grant permission to dismantling this ship to a junkyard would, in our opinion, create a substantial and serious precedent within the Heritage world.

It is only until the beginning of January that we were made aware in Flanders, through press reports, of an existing problem related to the Georg Büchner/Charlesville.

On January 8th, the Flemish Association for Industrial Archaeology (V.V.I.A.) found out that the Georg Büchner was protected by law as a Heritage Monument under the laws and regulations of the State of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Both the Flemish Authorities, the governing bodies of Rostock and yourselves were informed thereof by the VVIA on this matter. Protection would as such be the guarantee for guaranteed survival and the constant re-evaluation of the heritage, and this protection can only be made null and void under very exceptional and specific circumstances - e.g. natural disasters, fire ... A "Denkmal" (Heritage) status should, in principle, be considered an "ad aeternum" state of existence.

## **Vlaamse Vereniging voor Industriële Archeologie vzw**

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As the Flemish Government conducted serious talks and negotiations with the competent authorities in the German State of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern as from the second half of January on the preservation of the ship and its eventual return to Flanders, our organization has refrained of pursuing additional direct contact with your services. We did not want to interfere as a “communications’ interference” throughout this process and endeavored to act and strictly comply with the agreements, where the negotiations would be ran by the Flemish government only.

In our midst and that of many other stakeholders, the hope and expectation resided that your service and the services of Rostock, would provide for the necessary time in order to analyze the problems pertaining to the existing project professionally and to strive for a solution.

After all, it is more than obvious and quite clear that the heritage conservation dossier of the Georg Büchner/Charlesville, by its nature and scale is very difficult and complicated, similar to the rezoning of a substantial industrial area (such as the legally protected buildings of the Limburg Coalmines).

It is therefore not possible to carry out a study of the condition of the ship in its actual state of conservation and define which resources will be needed for repair and renewed conservation in a very limited timeframe. At present, these data appear to be unavailable anywhere, as an initial step towards research could but could be taken fairly recently. It is therefore not possible, right now, to draw up a conservation management plan and a business plan. It is likewise impossible to provide for the required short-term financing. It is also not possible to build up the required legal and business structures in these several weeks or less than four months (from mid-January to present), including drawing up the future plans for the management of the ship.

From professional experience, I know that such an inquiry and preparing a solid and workable plan demands several months, usually more than a year.

At the same time several disciplines ought to be involved in the project.

Last Friday and totally unexpected, the press informed us that not only an answer was expected to the queries on the mode of conservation and the future destination of the vessel by the end of this month but that, at the same time, the necessary finances and guarantees ought to be deposited and guaranteed. Our Association – as well as anyone else – was quite unhappily surprised by this news.

In the meantime, we ponder about the question under which conditions and according to which procedures in your State it would be possible to lift the legal protection of a historical monument, and on what terms, timeframe and conditions. In most countries, protection can indeed be transferred after sales to the subsequent owners, and in most countries there are limitations and restrictions on the export of cultural heritage. A waiver of protection is in many cases tied to strict and often lengthy procedures. We suspect that this is not different in the State of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

During the past months the Flemish Association for Industrial Archaeology (V.V.I.A.) attempted to draw up a governing policy. VVIA did this in close contact with the Flemish Government who, as from the past month of January, was duly informed of all the steps it did take.

We give you a brief overview of the different steps already taken and also the one in sequence where:

- VVIA sent a vision paper/blueprint on the preservation and reassignment of the Georg Büchner/Charlesville to the Flemish Government on 30th January. On Friday, 8th February it was discussed at length with the Cabinet of Minister Bourgeois and with the management of the Agency of Protected Heritage sites. A synopsis of this note was sent to you at that time.
- The analysis revealed the need to extend, structure and widen the working base (the numerous volunteers involved to preserve the Charlesville in Flanders). After consultation with the stakeholders, on February 27th a non-profit organization (m/s Charlesville vzw) was founded, whose constitution and laws were registered at the Courts on 1st March and were published in the Moniteur Belge (the Belgian Official Gazette) on 12<sup>th</sup> March. After handling the required administrative obligations the founding of it was announced mid March through a press release, and also reported to you. This press text was drawn up in four languages (Dutch, German, French and English) and also distributed within the Heritage sector in Europe and beyond.



- On 15th March, in cooperation with Europa Nostra Belgium, and with an endorsement of Minister Bourgeois and Dr. Thomas Werner (Denkmalamt Rostock) the candidature of the Georg Büchner/Charlesville was submitted for the campaign of “The 7 Most Endangered” organized by Europa Nostra in cooperation with the European Investment Bank. The file referred to the border crossing nature of the file and the need to put this in consultation and cooperation between Flanders and the State of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and to search for a joint solution. Unfortunately, industrial and technical heritage was not a priority within this campaign and the Georg Büchner's candidacy was not withheld. We learned by now that the jury had the greatest appreciation for the project, also because of its originality and timeliness and the border crossing nature of it. It was also reported that the file would be a real prime contender, if it would be submitted next year with a very distinct cooperative approach from Germany and Belgium together including a restoration blueprint.
- In dealing with any, and certainly with a large-scale heritage project, the company structure including the planned management is deemed vital and a crucial point. In the course of April, VVIA launched and conducted an extensive research conducted and in which the pros and contras of the various possible legal structures were put against each other. A proposal of a form of company was finally worked out in which public private partnership and participations from both Flanders and Germany were made possible. The first draft statutes were presented on April 19th. At this time, the different capitalization phases (creation with a basic fixed capital and a partly variable capital, followed by two capital increases in the course of the process) are being evaluated.
- We also mention that first exploratory research into the condition of the ship and into its conservation worthiness under the Flemish Legislation could only be performed on 12-14th April in Rostock by a team of the Agency for Heritage Protection. The data of this research will be critical for the next steps to be undertaken.

In our view, these steps - as in all professional heritage files - are to be made as follows:

- The drawing up of a conservation management plan: the integrated view and planning of the preservation of the Heritage, but also for necessary new additions and changes, the physical accessibility, and conservation and maintenance.
- Based on this, draw up a financial plan - both in terms of operating and investment needs as on operational expenses and revenues (own resources and subsidies on the basis of the legal provisions).
- Draw up a business plan, and latter to be referred back to the suggested business structure.

This project-based and professional approach requires the necessary time, not just for study but mainly for the development and testing of concepts and content ideas - where preserving the heritage is the prime objective.

The Flemish Association for Industrial Archaeology (V.V.I.A.) is convinced that only a legal protection gives the necessary long term guarantees to preserve the Georg Büchner/Charlesville in the long run and to guarantee the maintenance of the Heritage values. At this time, given the geographical situation, the Government of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is the primarily responsible party for this conservation. By registering the vessel at the time on the list of protected monuments, your Government has already taken an important responsibility.

In consideration of the eventual transfer of the vessel to Flanders, the protection by the Flemish Government is this guarantee. Cooperation with and between the various authorities is therefore a sine qua non condition for the ship's future.

This is something which the Flemish Association for Industrial Archaeology wants to pursue and participate on a very collegiate way in a think-tank and be involved in co-operation. At least, if offered the further opportunity for that purpose by your services.