

Aan Europa Nostra

THE HAGUE

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Betreft: Nomination Charlesville/Georg Büchner "7 most endangered"

Dear Europa Nostra,

The Charlesville/Georg Büchner is a ship with a history connecting it to two member states of the European Union: Belgium and Germany. In that sense the ship is truly a piece of European heritage.

The Charlesville was launched by Cockerill shipyards in Hoboken near Antwerp in 1951 for the shipping company Compagnie Maritime Belge. The ship carried passengers and freight from Antwerp to Matadi, the main harbour of the Belgian colony of Congo between the beginning of the 1950s and 1967. The ship and the techniques used are prime examples of the knowhow of the shipbuilding industry on the banks of the Scheldt River immediately after the Second World War. This industry has since disappeared. The Charlesville has a high heritage value because it formed the connection between Belgium and its former colony Congo. The ships of the Compagnie Maritime Belge were the primary means of transport before the airlines took over this role. The Charlesville also has a social and cultural value as whole generations of Catholic missionaries and colonialists used the ship and similar ones for their voyages. The arrival of the ships of the Compagnie Maritime Belge in Antwerp was an event that is still engraved in the collective memory of the city.

Yet, the Charlesville only navigated out of the port of Antwerp for sixteen years. During the longest part of its history the ship was connected to the Baltic harbour

of Rostock. In July 1967 the ship was bought by the VEB Deutsche Seereederei Rostock and became part of the East-German merchant fleet as the Georg Büchner. From June 1977 the Büchner was used as a stationary vessel for the schooling of young seamen, later including a boarding school. In 1991 the property of the ship was transferred to the city of Rostock. The next step in the history of the ship was its functioning as a youth hostel operated by the Trägerverein Traditionsschiff Rostock. Many thousands of people once stood on the decks of the Georg Büchner in Rostock or followed classes in its holds. The Büchner has become a Rostock city icon, which is reflected by the inclusion of the ship on the list of monuments of the German federal State of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

For the moment the future of the Charlesville/Georg Büchner is unclear. The Trägerverein Traditionsschiff Rostock is not able to carry the responsibility for the care of the ship. Any future project for the ship needs to take into account the costs of conserving and renovating a seagoing vessel of this size. Furthermore a realistic plan for a future that is worthwhile needs to be drawn out. This future should be viable in the long run and needs to reconcile the heritage value with the new use of the ship. There needs to be a clear vision about the mooring place of the ship and the safe accessibility for the public. It will be necessary to carefully consider all these elements if the Charlesville/Georg Büchner is to receive a new future.

Time has come to add a next layer to the story of the Charlesville/Georg Buchner. The Flemish Government therefore supports the nomination of the Charlesville/Georg Buchner for the Europa Nostra campaign "the 7 most endangered". As one of the last large seagoing vessels built between 1900 and 1960 that still exist in Europe, this ship deserves your full attention.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Geert Bourgeois', with a horizontal line underneath.

Geert Bourgeois