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**Destruction of the old city (Suriçi) of Diyarbakır since fall 2015 and its current status**

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Located on the transition line between Anatolia, Mesopotamia and the Ararat plateau, Diyarbakır lies at a junction where main caravan routes have intersected from ancient times to present. The first fortress is assumed to have been built by the Hurritaens in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. Housing numerous civilizations and states during its history, the city also functioned as a regional capital (center) for the Persian, Roman, Sassanian, Byzantine and Islamic era empires thanks to its geopolitical importance. With its multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-layered character the city hosts various cultural properties in urban archaeological site, which include distinctive civil architecture, religious architecture comprising mosque and church structures and public structures. The fortified old city (Suriçi) area has a total of 595 registered structures, of which 147 are monumental and 448 others are civil architecture examples.

In 1988, Suriçi, involving the citadel (Inner Castle), was officially put under conservation as "Diyarbakır Urban Archaeological Site". The first protection-oriented development plan made in Suriçi area in 1990 has been revised as the "Surici Urban Conservation Plan" in 2012. After the nomination of the "Diyarbakır Fortress and Hevsel Gardens Cultural Landscape" for the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2012, a "Site Management Plan" was worked out together based on a participative approach with municipalities, related governmental institutions, NGOs, initiatives, scientists and neighborhood mayors in the city. During the 39th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Bonn/Germany in June/July 2015, the proposed site has been approved as a World Heritage.

**Conflict period in the walled old city (Suriçi)**

The end of the 2,5 years long ceasefire and negotiations about the solution of the Kurdish question between the Turkish government and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in July 2015 had grave impacts on the World Heritage Site, particularly Suriçi. The armed conflict reached quickly also the city of Diyarbakir. For all or certain parts of Suriçi, the buffer zone of the World Heritage Site, six times curfews have been declared each for several days since September 2015. These curfews were 24 hours full blockades and have led to clashes between Turkish state forces and Kurdish rebel groups which resulted in the death of hundreds of people and in a serious destruction in the affected area. Particularly the last ongoing curfew since 11.12.2015, accompanied by the use of heavy military weapons like tanks, mortar and artillery by the government, was the most devastating one. The integrity of Suriçi, the authenticity of the streets and numerous historical buildings and monuments have experienced damage and destruction. The state operations have been finished officially on March 10, 2016, but the blockade of the five neighborhoods Dabanoğlu, Fatih Paşa, Hasırlı, Cemal Yılmaz and Savaş still continues.

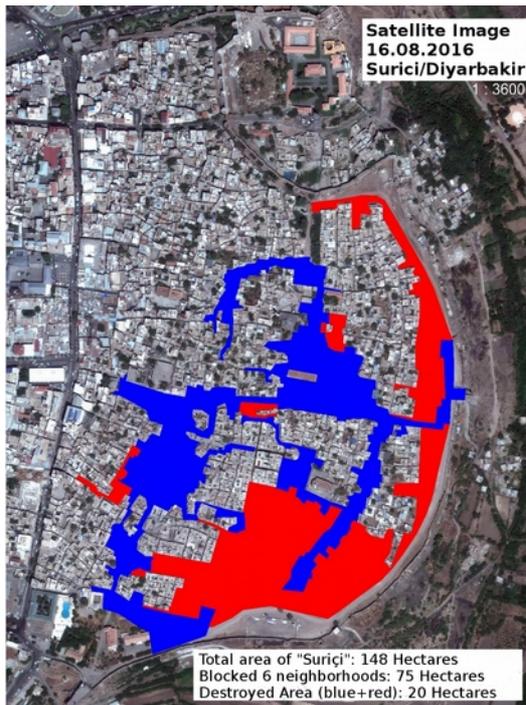
Experts of the observation and control commissions of the World Heritage Site Management – at that time situated at the Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality - have done three examinations in the affected neighborhoods on the dates and thus have prepared reports on the fact findings. After December 11, 2015, due to the refusal of access to the affected area for the the Site Management, all assessments about damages and destruction due to armed conflict and the period afterwards have been done based on the news in the local and national media, own limited observations, talks to displaced people from the affected area

and information and images shared by the Governor of Diyarbakir. All reports have been sent to the Turkish Ministry for Culture and Tourism, Turkish National Commission for UNESCO, ICOMOS Turkish National Commission and ICORP Turkey Commission with request to do broader assessments and take measures for improvement and conservation in cooperation with the World Heritage Site Management in the affected areas. All requests of the Site Management have been denied, postponed or remained unanswered.

### The dimension of the ongoing destruction

The intensive three months long armed conflict between 12/2015 and 03/2016 has created serious destruction in the affected five neighborhoods of Surici. However, the period after March 10, 2016 has resulted in a significant bigger destruction. The continued blockade of the affected neighborhoods after March 10, 2016 has been argued by the Turkish government with ongoing security problems. But Turkish security forces and employees for this destruction have entered daily the affected area. Dredges and other heavy equipment have been used on order of the Turkish government in the affected neighborhoods for the systematic destruction of registered and non-registered buildings, of which the majority had no or light damage, and roads have been opened or broadened. While in one part of the affected area grave damages have been observed on the authentic streets, non-registered housing buildings, civil architectural elements and texture of the registered buildings, in a larger part satellite images and other taken pictures underline that numerous blocks of buildings have disappeared in a large area. Particularly the neighborhoods of Fatih Paşa, Hasırlı and Cemal Yılmaz have lost the big majority of its structures. The Turkish government even did not show any serious effort to rescue any authentic elements of historical buildings and monuments among the debris which has been excavated quickly and roughly. To summarize it, the authentic historical fabric of almost half of the old city of Diyarbakir has been lost forever.

The fortress, which is the core of the World Heritage, has experienced a number of damages by the Turkish government and security forces. For example, poles have been put into the walls and towers in creating meter long holes, toilets have been installed on the fortress for soldiers and police which contaminated the walls significantly with waste water, many small structures have been built at the walls, military equipment has been put on the towers in order to shoot into Suriçi.



**destroyed until May 10,2016, red: destroyed**

continuity of authentic, community and private life based on handicraft and trade has been terminated, families have been displaced which has brought a number of years.

Areas of which almost 70 hectares cover the five neighborhoods in the satellite image from May 10, 2016, it could be stated that they were completely destroyed. A second satellite image from August 16, 2016, shows that they were destroyed completely.

Among them are at least 500 partly buildings at least. Among them are 3 monumental structures and 53 environmentally damaged 25 civil architectural, 7 monumental structures and 15 important buildings. Totally this meets 170 architecturally important structures which have been destroyed or damaged. As of April 4, 2017 it can be stated that after the 2<sup>nd</sup> satellite

image the destruction continued in the same speed. Approximately around 35-40 hectares in the eastern part of Suriçi have been destroyed up to date.



***Image: Air image of Suriçi, 04.03.2017***

What should have been done in order to prevent the loss of architectural elements and texture at the registered constructions which experienced damage due to an armed conflict? It is necessary that at first assessment works have the priority, followed by the conservation of authentic building elements in site before any excavation work will be implemented. All these works need to be done by taking into consideration the city as a world heritage site and putting the humans and an participative approach in the center of programs and projects.

### **Legal issues and other developments**

Parallel to the ongoing destruction the Turkish government took grave steps on Suriçi. An expropriation order has been issued for Suriçi by the Cabinet of Ministers dated on 21.03.2016. These constitute 82 percent of the total area in Suriçi which included also monuments like churches and mosques. The remaining 18 percent largely belong already to governmental institutions. Up to date the implementation of the expropriation order has been started for a major part of the destroyed eastern part of Suriçi. For people in rent the government has offered only around 2000-3000 Euros for their furniture and other staff which they usually could not take with them when they were forced to leave their houses.

The government claimed that with the expropriation Suriçi would be developed and reconstructed according to the Suriçi Urban Conservation Plan (2012). So far all steps were and are contradictory. Based on the plans and projects presented to the public since 2016, there is the fear that the whole demography of Suriçi would change in favor of higher social classes and a unsustainable tourism run by big companies. Considering that Suriçi is the core of the public memory of the Diyarbakır city, it would lead to a disruption of the cultural continuity with the annihilation of the collective memory based on a millenium-old accumulation and hand-over of the urban property.

In September 2016 the Turkish government took a decision which put all management sites

of cultural sites, including World Heritage sites, of Turkey under the direct control of the ministry for culture and tourism. Thus the management site of the World Heritage Site of Diyarbakir lost its independency. Two months later the Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality has been put under forced administration by the Turkish government after the co-mayors have been arrested. This undemocratic control allowed the revision of the Suriçi Urban Conservation Plan in December 2016 which legitimized all destruction and measures for taken in Suriçi since end of 2015.

The Hevsel Gardens and other parts of the Tigris Valley, which as part of the heritage area, have not been strongly affected by the armed conflict, is under danger. The government declared almost the whole heritage area and buffer zone in the Tigris Valley as an area to be planned newly. In doing so, the former Tigris Valley Project, which has been canceled after an appeal to court by the Metropolitan Municipality in 2015, is taken as basis for that.

In March 2017 the UN Committee for Human Rights published a report on the human rights violations in the mainly Kurdish southeastern province of Turkey and accused the Turkish government of systematic human rights violations including destruction of settlements and displacements of hundred of thousands of people. This report included the practice in Suriçi. Few weeks later on March 24, 2017 the UN Security Council approved a resolution (2347 – 2017) on destruction of cultural heritage by non-state and state actors.

In this regard the demands are:

- The Turkish government must immediately cancel the curfew in Suriçi, stop all activities of destruction and expropriation, take back the revision of the Urban Conservation Plan, must cover the costs for reconstruction housings for all displaced people and a new site management with the active and equal inclusion of the civil society must be ensured.
- The UNESCO World Heritage Committee and Advisory Boards must send immediately an reactive mission to Diyarbakir whithoout a permission by the Turkish government. In connection with that an assessment and documentation must be carried out based on high standards on conservation through a commission with the participation of independent scientists from different fields, broad civil society, Turkish Ministry for Culture and Tourism and related municipalities.
- The UN Security Council must take action if the Turkish government rejects the above mentioned demands and thus call the International Crime Court.