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Germany Must Co-Finance Recovery  
Of Sunken Congo Ship Charlesville /  
Georg Büchner – Research Report  
Presented To Poland, Germany And  
Flanders

**Germany Must Co-Finance Recovery Of Congo Ship  
Charlesville / Georg Büchner**

**Germany is morally and legally responsible for the destruction of the last historical Belgian merchant ship Charlesville / Georg Büchner.** As a matter of fact, Germany is responsible for the **unseen mismanagement** by subordinate authorities who knowingly and intentionally accepted that this unique and still legally protected ship was handed over to a maritime ghost company on the Seychelles not even possessing a mail address and to an obscure scrap yard in Lithuania. Germany is fully responsible for the trickery with which the City of Rostock and the Region of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern sabotaged a ready-made Flemish conservation project. The tricks include ignoring and not studying take-over proposals, invoking completely unfounded excuses to reject them, unilaterally and continuously changing the conditions of sale, imposing artificial and unrealistic deadlines, not communicating any decision on the Flemish take-over proposal, delivering the ship to a ghost company which did not have to submit any guarantee on the conservation of the protected monument, supporting a comedy according to which the ship was not going to be sold for scrap but as a hotel ship, not replying to countless letters by the prospective candidates and Flemish Minister Bourgeois, the publication of misleading press statements by municipal and regional authorities, authorising an illegal looting of the ship prior to departure, the endorsement of the sale of the ship to a ghost company by the German Judiciary, insufficient enforcement of environmental laws by German authorities who were clearly informed of an intended illegal exportation of waste, and, possibly, negligent inspection of the ship by the authorities. This **concerted mismanagement** with regard to a unique historical ship which is, to this day, a listed monument under German law, and which was set to become an officially protected monument in Flanders, amounts to intentional destruction of cultural heritage. Following the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan by the Taliban, the Unesco adopted a Declaration in 2003 which states that **a State that intentionally destroys or intentionally fails to take appropriate measures to prohibit, prevent, stop, and punish any intentional destruction of cultural heritage of great importance for humanity bears the responsibility for such destruction** (Art VI). Concretely, **Germany has to bear at least part of the costs of raising the sunken Charlesville / Georg Büchner and to recover and conserve the looted interior elements.**

**Charlesville / Georg Büchner Is Now Protected Underwater Heritage**

We conducted in-depth legal research which reveals that, today, the sunken Charlesville / Georg Büchner is **protected underwater heritage** and that **Poland,**

**Germany and Belgium must protect the wreck.** Upon removal of the wreck, it must be raised **intact**. The first sonar images indicate that the hull is still in good condition. The UN Law of the Sea Convention (Art. 303(1)) obliges the three Governments to **cooperate** to this end. We have invited the Governments to start negotiations and to conclude an international treaty on the salvaging of the vessel, as is usual in such a context. We hope that Germany will recognize its responsibility and that it will cooperate towards giving the drama of the Charlesville a happy end. After countless efforts and many consecutive disappointments, we will now do everything to facilitate a realistic salvage project in cooperation with all involved parties.

### **Research Report Delivered To Poland, Germany And Flanders**

Today, we delivered an extensive **Report on the Conservation and the Salvaging of the Charlesville / Georg Büchner** to Polish, German and Flemish authorities. It covers, *inter alia*, the **unique heritage values** of the ship, details on possible **causes of the sinking** (unseaworthiness and/or intentional scuttling), full data on **parties involved**, the **legal status of the wreck**, possible **future uses**, the **approach to and costs of the recovery** of the wreck, and **proposals for next steps**. Concretely, we demand that a **professional feasibility study** of the salvage operation, the repatriation and the first restoration of the ship be carried out in cooperation with two renowned international salvage companies. This study can be ready by mid-September. All involved parties will then be able to make well-informed decisions. We recall that we have been demanding a feasibility study on the conservation and repatriation of the ship since early 2012.

### **Support our campaign**

Watererfgoed Vlaanderen or 'Flanders Water Heritage' has been campaigning to save the Charlesville / Georg Büchner since 2009 and is the only organisation which managed to launch concrete conservation projects. You may wish to follow our activities on our website [www.watererfgoed.be](http://www.watererfgoed.be), subscribe to our free-of-charge newsletter *Getijden* ('Tides') via <http://tools.emailgarage.com/Assets/3SOulxN1JkmkMCzHfuioUg~~/InschrijvingNwsbrfWV.html>) or like our Facebook page, where we will post all our press releases. We warmly invite all national and foreign organisations and groups (including Facebook groups) to endorse our **Manifesto to Save the Last Congo Ship Charlesville / Georg Büchner**. It has been endorsed by no less than 84 organisations. The current version is on <http://www.watererfgoed.be/Docs/Watererfgoed%20Manifest%20Charlesville%2028%205%2013.pdf>. To support us, just send an email and, if applicable, your logo, to [secr@watererfgoed.be](mailto:secr@watererfgoed.be). Thanks !

***Watererfgoed Vlaanderen / Flanders Water Heritage unites and defends all the dry and wet water heritage of the Region of Flanders in Belgium*** (over 100 organisations active in the field of historic ships, shipping and harbour museums, water monuments, traditions, arts and culture, tourist and commercial service providers, experts, researchers and lovers of water heritage in all its forms). Our umbrella organisation promotes the conservation and valorization of all Flemish water heritage, the water-mindedness of the Flemings and the international appeal of Flanders as a beacon of shipping and port culture.

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