The European Competence Centre for Cultural Heritage (4CH) has come together with multiple partners and authorities to create the SUM initiative in order to help digitise and preserve Ukrainian cultural heritage for future generations.

The rich cultural heritage of Ukraine has seen the destruction of museums and artworks in the short space of a month. Some appear on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites are now at acute risk of destruction.

After witnessing the destruction of artefacts, monuments and sites in Ukraine, the EU funded project 4CH led by Instituto Nazionale Di Fisica Nucleare (INFN) set up a task force to help digitise and preserve artefacts and to ensure that the digitise version is stored out of harm’s way. The SUM initiative – Save the Ukraine Monuments is organised by Professor Franco Niccolucci, Director of VAST-
LAB, with the support from the European Commission, the Ukrainian embassy to Italy and the Italian Ministry of Research, as well as many Ukrainian ministers involved in cultural heritage, digitisation and research.

The 4CH task force is led by a Belgian partner and it is working with colleagues from Poland to find direct contacts with personal and institutional contacts in Ukraine who are working with cultural heritage and digitisation technologies, such as 3D. Many brave cultural heritage staff in Ukraine have taken great risks in order to fetch the datasets stored in institutional repositories in order to transfer them to Italy and the quantity of 3D-records is very impressive.

A technical task force has also been set up within INFN so secure storage and security checks on the incoming data are active. So far, the project has received data from mostly Kyiv, Lviv and Odessa, but also from minor centres. The data flow is huge, with transfer progressing at the best speed the situation may provide. As of now, 4CH has received about 50 Terabytes of data. The content of the files is stored, checked and catalogued properly in order to find easily. It has been a sensitive work, which was kept under wraps in order not to attract too much attention from cyber criminals, but it is now deemed to be robust enough.

The SUM initiative has been able to speak to responsible authorities in Ukraine, and to several institutions and professionals, as well as private companies who are helping with the 3D digitisation of monuments and artefacts. They are all actively engaged in the data transfer to the 4CH project. There is an informal agreement in place that once the situation allows the project will return the data kept in storage in Europe to its legitimate owners/authorities. The project is also preparing to help with technology for the reconstruction of monuments that are damaged or destroyed if need be.

The EU funded project 4CH is led by Instituto Nazionale Di Fisica Nucleare, Italy, with 18 partners from all over Europe working together to set up a European Competence Centre for the Conservation Cultural Heritage. The competence centre started in January 2021 and is already providing services and tools to enable preservation and conservation of historical monuments and sites using the latest, most effective technologies with special attention to 3D.

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