

PRESS RELEASE

On 19th October 2015 the Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-Moon accompanied by Miroslav Lajčák, deputy prime minister and minister of foreign and European affairs of the Slovak Republic, their wives and further high level guests paid a visit **to the University Library in Bratislava to see precious exhibits of the unique Bašagić collection of Islamic manuscripts inscribed on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register.**

The delegation was greeted by Silvia Stasselova, the Director General of the University Library in Bratislava since 1st October 2015.

Silvia Stasselova has been an active member of IFLA Management of Library Associations Section Standing Committee since 2007 (from 2009 to 2012 she served as IFLA MLAS Secretary/IFLA Officer).

In her address Silvia Stasselova stressed a rich, nearly one-hundred-year tradition of the University Library, the oldest research library in Slovakia, in supporting education, research and culture. She briefly presented the historic buildings of the library where in 1802-1848 sessions of the Hungarian Diet were held and in the revolutionary year of 1848 the law abolishing serfdom was adopted. At that time Ľudovít Štúr was an active Slovak deputy of the Diet, whose 200th birth anniversary is commemorated in Slovakia these days.

The University Library in Bratislava underwent major reconstruction work ten years ago to become a modern library and cultural centre. The library's collections include nearly three million documents, the oldest of which date from the twelfth century.

The library has a long history of cooperating with the United Nations. In October 1947, at the proposal of the Czechoslovak government, the University Library in Bratislava became a UN depository library and in 1957 an official document was signed establishing the UNESCO depository library. In 1994 a UNESCO Centre was established in the library, which is the only information and documentation centre for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in the Slovak Republic.

The UNESCO Centre is also the Secretariat of the Slovak Committee for the UNESCO Programme Memory of the World. Since 2000 the register of this programme has included the Bašagić Collection, a collection of Arabic, Turkish and Persian manuscripts that the University Library in Bratislava acquired for its collection on its foundation in 1924 by purchase from the famous Bosnian man of letters, scholar and collector Safvet Beg Bašagić.

Safvet Beg Bašagić came from a culturally mature Muslim background in Bosnia but maintained good relations with the local Slavic population. He was born in 1870 in a family

with literary traditions. He studied oriental languages, became a professor of languages at a grammar school in Sarajevo and later at a university in Zagreb; he was a poet, a translator, a literary scholar and a historian. From 1910 to 1918 he was active in political life in Bosnia. He later worked in the Sarajevo Museum and died in 1934. Over a lifetime as an active collector he built a personal library, the most precious part of which was his collection of Arabian, Turkish and Persian manuscripts. At the end of his life he decided to sell his collection to the University Library in Bratislava with the wish that in this way his valuable collection would be conserved for future generations.

The Bašagić Collection currently comprises 598 manuscripts in 284 volumes, of which 393 are in Arabic, 114 in Turkish and 88 in Persian. The whole collection has been professionally restored and in 2007 – 2011 has been fully digitised.

The majority of the collection is made up of theological works, but it also includes works on philosophy, metaphysics, logic and psychology. Other scientific disciplines that are represented include astronomy, mathematics, politics and rhetoric. There is artistic literature in both poetry and prose and other works of human creativity. The manuscripts in the collection include original works written by authors in their own hand – autographs, and also copies made by professional scribes. In addition to regular works, the manuscript includes a number of unique pieces. This collection, whose manuscripts document the development of Islamic civilisation from its origin in ancient Arabia to the end of the 19th century is of the highest significance for many nations of the world. After the fire at the National Library in Sarajevo in August 1992, it is a rare and extremely precious collection of documents on Islamic culture.

The Bašagić Collection has attracted great interest from researchers and scholars all over the world. Our collection has been exhibited in great cities around the world such as Rome and Tehran in 2008–2009, in 2010 at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, as well as in Vienna, Ankara, Sarajevo and Seoul, in 2011 in Kuwait and in 2013 in Baghdad.

The General Director of the University Library in Bratislava together with Klára Meszárosová, Head of the Department of Manuscripts, Old and Rare Prints, showed the guests a selection of 15 most precious exhibits of the collection, among them was a copy of a codex from the 12th century, a work on ethics by Raghīb Isfahānī, which is the oldest fully preserved book in the collections of University Library in Bratislava. Other precious works include poetry by Ahmedi and his Book of Alexander, which date from the 14th century and the encyclopaedic work “*Marifetname* (the Book of Gnosis)” by Ibrahim Hakki, a manuscript of unique artistry.

The Secretary General of the United Nations showed interest in historic maps among the exhibited manuscripts and was interested to know how the precious documents are preserved. He appreciated the professional care of the University Library in Bratislava, especially the work of its Department of Manuscripts, Old and Rare Prints, where special conditions are created for storing and safe protection of manuscripts, including special air-conditioning to preserve this world cultural treasure.

Link to the digitized Bašagić Collection: <http://retrobib.ulib.sk/Basagic>

Link to the photo-gallery from the visit:

<http://www.ulib.sk/sk/spravy/archiv/generalny-tajomnik-osn-vcera-navstivil-ukb.html>