

"The protection of the integrity of monuments under seismic actions"
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Opening address by

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to apologize for the fact that previous commitments have unfortunately prevented me from being personally present in Thessaloniki to open this seminar on "The protection of the integrity of monuments under seismic actions".

I would first of all like to emphasize the important role of the European Centre for Prevention and Forecasting of Earthquakes (ECPFE) in Athens which, supported by EUR-OPA, has continued to regularly organise over the years several international events related to seismic risk on cultural heritage. The statement by Ms. Linda Pelli, Deputy Director of ECPFE at the 12th Ministerial Session of the Agreement in Saint Petersburg last year clearly illustrated the importance which Greece, through the efforts of both E.P.P.O. and ECPFE, so rightly attaches to the reduction of seismic risk and to the vulnerability of structures.

Cultural heritage is a key element of the history and identity of societies, contributing also to their economy and well being. Their possible loss following a natural disaster, such as an earthquake, subsequently has serious consequences since their recovery proves to be far more difficult than other buildings and sometimes it can even turn out to be impossible : just recall that out of the Seven Ancient Wonders, no less than 3 of them (Hanging Gardens of Babylon, Lighthouse of Alexandria and Colossus of Rhodes) were destroyed by earthquakes and disappeared for ever !

Considering the exceptional heritage present in Greece as well as its important seismicity, it appears essential to study their potential vulnerability and try to define protective measures. But such national priority to address threats to cultural heritage extends to the whole Mediterranean area with its many historical monuments potentially at risk. It is precisely this international cooperation to cope with common threats that the European and Mediterranean Agreement on Major Hazards (EUR-OPA) of the Council of Europe has been promoting since its creation in 1987.

The Agreement, now counting 26 member States, has always emphasized the required interaction between scientists and decision makers. Alongside its "political" body, the Committee of Permanent Correspondents which defines the main trends of its action, the associated activities are mainly carried out through a network of 27 specialized Centres, four of them focusing much of their attention on the subject of cultural heritage and risks :

- the European Centre for Prevention and Forecasting of Earthquakes (Athens, Greece).
- the European University Centre for the Cultural Heritage (Ravello, Italy),
- the European Centre on Urban Risks (Lisbon, Portugal)

- the European Centre on Vulnerability of Industrial and Lifeline Systems (Skopje, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).

Taking advantage of this opening session, I wish to confirm the commitment of the Agreement to pursue activities related to Cultural Heritage protection against hazards. Focusing on prevention, the Agreement is aware that disaster risk reduction must concern not only human and economic losses but also address the damages to cultural assets and the environment due to natural or technological hazards.

Without doubt the future work on cultural heritage and risk has to address an additional challenge: the specific impact of climate change on risks via its possible consequences on cultural heritage. Even if climate change essentially affects meteorological risks, and apparently has no impact on seismic risk itself, the ageing of the structures and their wearing out due to various causes such as humidity, ground-settlements, pollution, etc., make historical structures much more vulnerable than modern ones, and in particular with respect to seismic risk.

To conclude, I would like to thank once again the Earthquake Planning and Protection Organization (EPPO), and especially the European Centre for Prevention and Forecasting of Earthquakes (ECPFE), for the initiative to organize this seminar. Even if many eminent specialists will present their knowledge and experience on the important matter of seismic protection of monumental structures, the main interest of such a seminar is to encourage young scientists to improve in the future both the understanding of the phenomena and the measures to cope with it.

I wish you a very successful seminar.