

Welcome by ICOMOS Bulgaria

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

The topic of this conference is extremely relevant for Bulgaria, as it is related to the fate of a significant part of the Bulgarian cultural heritage, created in the second half of the 20th century – during socialism.

The truth is that the national conservation system of Bulgaria has proven to be unprepared to deal with the fundamentally contradictory heritage. On the one hand, it includes sites with indisputable architectural and artistic values – such is the case of the *Buzludzha Monument*. On the other hand, some of them suggest strong ideological messages that are absolutely unacceptable in the context of today's democratic changes. Simultaneously, this heritage is a solid document of its time, a “window to the past” that can be irreversibly closed if this heritage is compromised or destroyed.

This contradiction raises a series of difficult questions: How can we separate the achievements and limit the propaganda? How should we preserve the testimony without uplifting it to glory? How can we admire it without being manipulated? How can we accept and recognize it when the wounds have not yet healed? How can we preserve the valuable elements of this type of monuments all by limiting their symbolic message?

The inability of the Conservation System to answer these questions costs the fate of many of these heritage sites. The Mausoleum, the monument „1300 years Bulgaria” and many other memorials have been destroyed. Valuable buildings of Bulgarian modernism of that time, although devoid of political connotations, were left without protection and were compromised or demolished. ICOMOS Bulgaria is extremely concerned about this situation.

That is why I perceive this conference not only as a prestigious international event, but also as an opportunity to save real values.

Above all, I believe in the expert principle as the basis for conservation. I also believe in international expert cooperation and partnership in expert networks. The history of ICOMOS Bulgaria has remarkable examples of such successful international expert networks. I will quote only the initiative by ICOMOS Bulgaria in 2000 “Expert network of Southeastern Europe”, which launched the project Cultural Routes of Southeastern Europe. This project provoked the first regional political forum dedicated to cultural heritage (Varna, 2005), with the participation of heads of state from the region, UNESCO, the Council of Europe and ICOMOS.

It is a pity that for reasons beyond our control, the opportunity for such a partnership between ICOMOS Bulgaria and ICOMOS Germany was missed in the award project “Keeping it modern!” of the Getty Foundation.

That is why ICOMOS Bulgaria is confidently involved in the preparation and holding of this conference. I am glad that young Bulgarian researchers, members of ICOMOS, with valuable scientific contributions in the study of the cultural heritage of the second half of the 20th century, also took part in the conference. I am sure that their contribution will be effective.

I sincerely hope that the conference will be a platform for a fruitful dialogue. I also hope that it will send out clear messages and recommendations to the national conservation system in Bulgaria to achieve a more modern and effective approach to understanding and preserving the dissonant heritage. I am sure that these messages will be useful for other countries in Central and Eastern Europe as well.

Dear Colleagues,

The system of values is the one that determines the behavior of the individual and of entire communities. It also determines the behavior of our ICOMOS community – the constant guardian of the preservation of the most valuable in the human historic environment. This is a task as noble as it is difficult. We – the Bulgarian National Committee of ICOMOS are part of the family of the International Council on Monuments and Landmarks and are thus called to follow and actively support and council tirelessly in favor of the protection of human treasures. It is our goal to stimulate the spirit by reviving cultural values and by including them in modern life!

At the same time, this is a battle for equality, the same one that is being fought by all European countries. It leads us to the foundations of what we now call European solidarity. We are convinced that the social, political, and spiritual energy of culture is always manifested in interaction.

That is why, today, I call on you, Colleagues, to open the window for light to come in, but also for our light to be seen. This is how we understand the light of connection and communication. Because we are a community! We have deep confidence both in our own strength and in the strength of our connection!

I wish everyone a warm welcome!

Gabriela Semova-Koleva
President of ICOMOS Bulgaria