THE PROTECTION OF THE MULTICULTURAL SETTLEMENTS OF
THE OTTOMAN PERIOD IN THE BALKANS.

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After the total conquest of the whole of Balkan & Asia Minor
by the Ottomans during the 16th century, slowly but steadily
there was created an almost uniform architectural style in the
Empire. This «Ottoman» style was a fusion of all the old
local building traditions and was determined by the
multinational character of the Empire ‘s population, with
influences from the Renaissance of the Arts in West Europe.
In the cities, the different national Communities lived in
separate quarters’ with their own social life, concentrated
around their religious buildings, that were, at the same time,
their cultural and social centers.
The traditional structure of these multinational Settlements
was maintained until the end of the 19th century.
At the beginning of the 20th century, the Balkan wars lead to
the decomposition of the Ottoman Empire. The new National
States that were created in this territory, aimed at their national
homogeneity.
So, a period of massive and often violent deportations of old
local populations begun. Large land areas and Minorities’
quarters in big cities, were abandoned, destroyed or altered.
The destruction usually begun by the demolition of the
religious buildings of the opponent minorities. Mosques and
Minarets were being massively destroyed in the Balkans
and a lot of churches disappeared at that period in Asia
Minor.
After the two World Wars, the industrial development and
the need of new wider roads for cars, lead to the
decomposition of the traditional structure of the old
settlements.
In the balkan countries, the state usually ignores cultural
differentials or local peculiarities and applies a general
plan of monument protection for large areas. It often imposes
morphological elements that are considered as belonging to
the «genuine» national tradition, and it allows the alteration,
or even the destruction, of other local elements, that are not
considered as significant.
All this is obvious in all our countries in this part of the
world. It seems that the hard confrontations of the last two
centuries among the Balkan countries, that aimed at an
outopic «national purity», are being now continued
anachronistically, in the field of culture.
I believe that the main element to be protected, in the
settlements of the Ottoman period in the Balkans –
rregardless of the methods to be followed – is their
multicultural character.
In my opinion, all the remaining traditional settlements and
buildings in the Balkans and Asia Minor, are common cultural
heritage of all the peoples in our area. They don ‘t belong to
a single nation. They belong to all of us. And they need a
common policy for their protection and valorisation.
The specialists in conservation of cultural goods in Greece,
Turkey and in the other balkan Countries, have now the
duty to work together for the protection of our common
Heritage.
As a first step, I suggest that the two ICOMOS, of Greece
and of Turkey, should take the initiative to organize, in the
near future, a Congress, with the participation of all Balkan
ICOMOS, having as a special topic the common Action for
the Protection of the traditional multicultural Settlements
of the Ottoman period in our area.

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