

INTRODUCTION

Since its constitution, our organization has emphasized the necessity of intervening urgently and energetically for the protection of historic centres and artistic sites.

Consequently, the first concern of the Executive Committee has been to organize a conference on this theme. Thanks to the generous offer of the Spanish National Committee this conference took place in Spain during the month of March 1967.

The situation is too well known to necessitate a lengthy description ; some words will suffice. The defacement of monuments, the destruction of typical ensembles, and the cruel laceration of the living fabric of our historic districts constitute a lasting disfigurement of our countryside and our cities. The ever deeper deterioration of the traditional framework within which our daily life unfolds is at the point of creating a disequilibrium and aberrations such that we can doubt that it will be possible for our generation to transmit to those that follow the marvellous heritage which has been left to us by the generosity of nature and centuries of work. Until recent years the imperative necessity of a new order and of a new conception seemed only to concern Europe and the countries of Mediterranean region. Since then, however, it has revealed itself in its entire scope and complexity as a phenomenon common to all the countries of the world, although presenting different particularities and conceptions.

Efforts have been made on several sides to attack this problem but only according to determined aspects of the question and national or regional geographical limits.

We know that UNESCO has already elaborated and continues to think out documents which aim at setting forth international directives for the preservation of the cultural and monumental heritage. Thus, in 1960 the recommendation on archaeological excavations was passed. This field, although marginal, is close to the sector which is the object of our concern. At the present time the same organization is preparing another recommendation, the aim of which is to limit the damage that extensive public or private works can cause to the monumental heritage or to the countryside of a region.

Furthermore, for some time UNESCO has been accomplishing an indispensable task by sending missions of experts to those member states who request them. These missions work for the preservation and putting into use of monuments and sites and, in general, for the organization of national services for the protection of cultural property.

Among the international institutions of a regional character, the Council of Europe must be mentioned first of all, not because of the territory which it occupies but rather for the scientific rigour with which it approaches and undertakes the problem of the defence of ensembles of historic and artistic interest in this region of the world. The activity undertaken by this high authority is well known by all, especially through the five meetings organized during the past three years to study the protection of ancient cities.

During this conference, the first of a series of annual meetings, our Council took as its object the setting forth of the "status questionis" of the problem in the different regions of the world, the examination of what has been accomplished until now, the consideration and comparison of the different experiments, and the study of those aspects which have not yet been approached or defined.

I should like here to thank publicly our Secretary General, Professor Raymond Lemaire, for the preparation and scientific organization of the conference, and Mr. François Sorlin, Inspector General of the Historic Monuments of France who, with his competence in this field has kindly accepted to be general rapporteur for the conference.

Among the Spanish Authorities, to all of whom I should like to extend the warmest thanks for the truly marvellous hospitality which they have shown to all the participants, I am happy to mention in particular the Minister of Public Education and Science, Mr. Lora Tamayo, the Director General of the Fine Arts, Mr. Gratiniano Nieto and the Commissioner General of the Artistic Heritage, Mr. Gabriel Alomar.

The publication of this document constitutes a commitment that at the next meeting on this theme, armed with new experience, we will be able to present a reason for hoping for the solution of a problem which, in the present state of things, is one of the most difficult of our time.

Piero Gazzola