

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

Mr Rosen Plevneliev
President of the Republic of Bulgaria

The Council of Ministers of the
Republic of Bulgaria

The National Assembly of the
Republic of Bulgaria

Our Ref: GA/GJ/66

Paris, 8 April 2015

Subject: Endangered cultural heritage in Bulgaria

Your Excellencies,

During its most recent meeting held in Paris on 9 -10 March 2015, the international ICOMOS Board was officially informed by the Bulgarian National Committee of ICOMOS about worrying trends in current policy approaches to conservation and restoration of cultural heritage in Bulgaria that have already substantially and visibly endangered a number of cultural monuments in the country. ICOMOS is also deeply concerned that these policy approaches may result in adverse effects on the Bulgarian cultural properties inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

ICOMOS understands that these changes in policy approaches have been motivated by an effort to support regional development in the country by increasing cultural tourism. While policies benefitting local communities are welcome, the cases presented in the report submitted to the ICOMOS Board make it immediately clear that this process has stimulated a widespread trend of large-scale conjecture-based reconstructions on top of the ruins of archaeological sites in Bulgaria. Rather than enhancing the significance of the monuments involved, the large-scale replacement of missing original materials and forms is destroying the authentic spirit of these monuments and sites. By substituting original structures, these new constructions actually falsify history and cause an irreversible loss of authenticity. In addition, they may render any further scientific research impossible.

Such reconstructions go against internationally accepted scientific approaches to conservation and violate the principles of the Venice Charter, Nara Document of Authenticity as well as the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (paragraph 86), to which Bulgaria is a signatory.

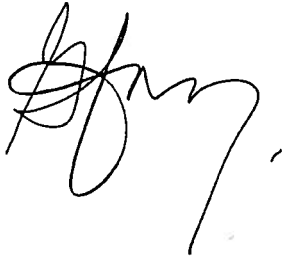
Being deeply convinced that a sustainable policy in the field of heritage protection should be based on internationally acknowledged and broadly established principles of conservation, ICOMOS appeals to the Bulgarian State to urgently undertake effective actions in order to:

1. Put an immediate halt to the on-going conjecture-based reconstructions in the country and ensure appropriate scientific assessment of their effects in order to guarantee that all future conservation and restoration works in Bulgaria follow accepted principles and ethics of scientific conservation, as defined in the Venice Charter and other ICOMOS and international doctrinal documents (World Heritage Operational guidelines, §86 in particular);

2. Guarantee expert involvement in national procedures for calls for tender under the EU Operational Programmes to ensure that internationally acknowledged scientific principles of conservation are applied in all projects in order to minimize risks that heritage authenticity and cultural values are destroyed;
3. Establish, with the comprehensive expert assistance of ICOMOS Bulgaria and all of ICOMOS more generally, a continuous training programme in the field of heritage conservation aimed at building relevant capacity within local authorities for addressing issues related to heritage protection and cultural tourism.

ICOMOS assures all cultural authorities in Bulgaria of our willingness to help and advice. As a first step in this direction, ICOMOS is ready to contribute to this process by organizing an on-site mission to Bulgaria in support of a scientific assessment of the implementation of internationally accepted conservation principles to the cultural heritage of Bulgaria.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gustavo Araoz', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Gustavo Araoz
President