



HELLENIC REPUBLIC
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
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Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nikos Dendias' opening address in the 2nd International Conference on Cultural Heritage, entitled "Hellenism and Islamic culture. The positive aspects of interaction and its prospects"

"Ladies and gentlemen,

It was with great pleasure that I was informed of the organization of the 2nd International Conference on Cultural Heritage by the Institute of Foreign Affairs, in collaboration with the National Kapodistrian University of Athens.

The topics selected for this year's Conference are of current interest and completely relevant to what is happening in our area today.

After all, the Middle East and North Africa share millennia of common history with Greece.

Cultures and religious dogmas that were born and flourished in this area interacted with each other.

Doctrines of Islam, Churches of Christianity and older beliefs are elements that formed multicultural and multi-religious societies.

Nowadays these societies are threatened by extreme beliefs, views that invoke outdated religious dogmas and revive long-forgotten hatred and rivalries.

This is exactly what happened when the Turkish government decided to turn into mosques two timeless symbols of the coexistence of peoples, cultures and religions, The Hagia Sophia and the Monastery of Chora, two monuments that received, precisely for their symbolism, the designation of World Heritage Sites.

In the past Turkey saw to it that these two monuments were turned into museums. Today, however, they are far from this role. They have become the object of political exploitation, inducing unprovoked hostilities and rivalries that faded many years ago.

It is true that Greek and Islamic cultures are immediately recognizable throughout the history of the Mediterranean basin. Contacts and interactions created historical and cultural ties between the two civilizations.

In the initial phase of Islamic civilization, most of the literary achievements of the Hellenistic world were translated into the Arabic language, resulting in the expansion of its vocabulary and idioms.

It was this encounter with and assimilation of the achievements of Greek culture that marked the development of the intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm of the scholars of Islam, giving new impetus to fields such as medicine, mathematics, philosophy, astronomy, architecture and alchemy.

A typical example of this interaction is the exact rendering of the Hippocratic Oath in Arabic in the 9th century.

Respectively, the basic principles of the philosophy of Aristotle and Plato found enthusiastic supporters and translators among the intellectuals and philosophers of Islam. At the same time, Arabic translations saved works and excerpts of the ancient Greek tradition from extinction.

In many respects, Islam can be considered an interlocutor of Greek antiquity and Byzantium. The richness of historical and cultural experiences, along with religious traditions, can ensure the positive involvement of all parties in the resolution of present-day issues and conflicts and inspire a common vision for the creative and peaceful co-existence of the peoples of the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

In the 21st century no one is allowed to open the floodgates and for ideological reasons cause the destabilization of regions and states.

I wish the Conference every success in its work.

I am certain that it will be the starting point for the expression of many enriching views on the future, which can only be a common and peaceful one for all the peoples in the region”.