Ladies and Gentlemen,
My dear colleagues and friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to Patras as the President of the Organizing Committee of the 8th International Symposium on the Conservation of Monuments in the Mediterranean Basin. I wish you a pleasant stay and I hope the Symposium will be an opportunity for fruitful discussions, strengthening the already existing ties and establishing future collaborations.

The history of the people living around the Mediterranean Basin can be traced back to the first steps of mankind. This rich past has offered us an invaluable cultural heritage and it is our task to identify it, to interpret and understand it and, last but not least, to preserve it in order to make it accessible for the generations to come.

The preservation of this rich heritage is at the core of the preoccupations of the International Group for the Conservation of Monuments in the Mediterranean Basin, which organized the first Symposium held in Bari in 1989. Since then, several other Symposia have taken place, highlighting the interest raised by this issue as well as the importance of the subject.

At the same time, threats to this heritage are growing and new problems are arising. This is the reason why the main theme of the Patras Symposium was chosen to be “Monument damage hazards and rehabilitation technologies”. Indeed, let us not forget that many areas all around the Mediterranean Basin are earthquake-prone. In the eastern part of the Mediterranean, where some of the oldest civilizations have flourished, the populations have learnt since prehistory to live with earthquakes, either in the expectation of an earthquake or with the memory of such an event. The omnipresence of this hazard is still visible in the archaeological remains of many monuments or cities occasionally destroyed and reconstructed, as well as in the typology of the major buildings, which reveal an advanced knowledge of structural systems and materials’ technologies, in the perpetual fight for their survival. Let us also recall the presence of other hazards...
which affected the same region in the past, namely the well-known volcanic eruptions in the Aegean Sea or in the Italian peninsula. New hazards have been added, which as opposed to the aforementioned ones, have the characteristic to be anthropogenic. Let us mention here not only the well-known issues of environmental change or tourism but also, more recently, the devastating wild fires and - maybe the most important hazard (due to the fact that it touches the core of human values of mutual tolerance and understanding): armed conflicts resulting in the destruction of the monumental remains of the opposite side.

All these hazards pose a series of problems related to monuments’ conservation. The issue of safety in earthquake-prone areas is one of the most important. Engineers and scientists face many questions, namely how to evaluate the structural condition of a building and how to achieve improvements, if necessary, without applying invasive techniques. A related issue is, precisely, the efficiency of the proposed techniques, which is affected by the availability and quality of workmanship. Problems such as the decay of the existing materials and the durability of the repaired ones require continuous research effort for their solution, as it is now known that the environmental strains are not constant in time and may also greatly differ from place to place. In another field, the so-called “minor” heritage, consisting of buildings which are not so important taken separately but form very important entities if considered in the scale of a village or city, there is a constant pressure of real estate forces. In this indicative list of problems we should include these threats posed by real estate and tourist forces and also the growing economy needs to our landscapes, which are the most precious in reminding the local “spirits of place”. In order to promote the discussion on the several issues related to the preservation of Cultural Heritage, seven thematic areas are proposed in the 8th International Symposium on the Conservation of Monuments in the Mediterranean Basin.

The first deals with historical and structural aspects of monuments. These two axes are interconnected and provide the fundamental basis for the understanding of a monument and its context before deciding any intervention. The second deals with natural and anthropogenic hazards, the detection of which at an early stage is of great importance for a quick response before any non reversible damage occurs. The third and fourth areas, analytical methods and
methodologies of damage assessment respectively, provide the necessary tools for the quantification of the damage or the state of the monument in terms of mechanical or environmental strains, in the broadest possible sense, and they are expected to provide the necessary data for a rational decision-making. These tools are nowadays supported by a wide variety of digital techniques for cultural heritage, the fifth thematic area, which offer possibilities not accessible in the past. The aforementioned issues aim to converge in a justified decision for the selection and application of technologies for damage rehabilitation, the sixth thematic area, in which the prediction and quantification of the expected effects are also included in order to avoid failures occasioned by the interventions themselves, as it was often the case in the past. Finally, the seventh thematic area deals with planning and cultural heritage management, which is expected to provide tools for a rational hierarchisation of the ever-growing needs for the preservation of Cultural Heritage.

It has to be admitted that, nowadays, a good though certainly not exhaustive, scientific basis exists for many of the aforementioned issues. Moreover, good experience is also available after several years of practice. There is now a strong need for interaction between the two, which requires discussion between various stakeholders for the production and application of recommendations. Several national and international institutions have already been activated towards this direction. The strengthening of the scientific basis of the preservation field is a constant demand and the establishment of interdisciplinary approaches is a good means to achieve it. It is also a condition for the incorporation of the intangible dimensions and values of the cultural heritage in our praxis and consciousness.

In these three days of work we will have the opportunity to hear and discuss about 125 communications, either in oral or in poster presentation. Participants come from 25 countries.

It is my obligation to thank some entities and persons.

First of all I wish to thank all the members of the Scientific Committee, especially Prof. Fulvio Zezza, Prof. Cristos Ftikos, Prof. Theophilos Theophanides and Dr. Eleni-Eva Toumbakari, for their essential effort and co-operation in this very important aspect of the Symposium. They are the guarantee of the high
level of the papers and posters presented to our Symposium.

I thank all the members of the Organizing Committee, especially Prof. Petros Koutsoukos, Dr Dimitris Kouis, Mrs Poly Georgakopoulou and Mr Ioannis Pantazopoulos.

The Symposium secretariat, Mrs Kanella Pouli and Mrs Mary Sypsa.

The Symposium organizing institutions, the National Technical University of Athens, the University of Patras and the Technical Chamber of Greece.

Also, all the other institutions and sponsors who have supported this Symposium. Their names are referred in the Proceedings. I thank them deeply for their support.

The Municipality of Patras for allowing us to hold the opening ceremony at this Historic Patras Theatre.

Finally, I want to thank Dr Demosthenes Giraud, Prof. Lorenzo Lazzarini and Prof. Rob Van Hees who have kindly agreed to give us the invited lectures.

I thank you all for participating in this Symposium and

I wish you a fruitful and enjoyable stay in Patras.

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