

# **Climate Change Impacts on Cultural and Natural Heritage: The Day After**

UN Climate Change Conference COP 25

Tuesday 10th of December 2019, 12.30-14.00

EU Pavilion, Room Helsinki

## **SPEECH of**

### **Mr. K. Hatzidakis, Minister of Environment and Energy, Greece**

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first to thank you for your presence today at this side event, which is a follow-up to the Greek proposal about the protection of cultural and natural heritage from the climate change impacts, presented at the Climate Change Summit in New York in September 2019. This event attempts to foster discussion on the new challenges that climate change poses to our cultural and natural heritage and to highlight the need for accelerated action.

Museums, archaeological sites and historical buildings are rarely included in conversations about climate change, which tend to focus on the wider impact and global threats to our contemporary world. Yet, these threats impact everything, from local cultural practices to iconic sites of outstanding universal value.

In light of this, it's worth exploring the relationship between our heritage and the changing global climate in more detail. Powerful storms, flooding, desertification and even the permafrost are already destroying important sites at an alarming rate.

Cultural heritage, is considered by many, as one of the four pillars of sustainable development. This is because, heritage, if properly managed, can be instrumental in enhancing social inclusion, developing intercultural dialogue, shaping the identity of a territory, improving the quality of the environment, providing social cohesion and -on the economic side- stimulating tourism development, creating jobs and enhancing investment. In other words, investment in cultural heritage can generate return in a form of social benefits and economic growth.

The impact of climate change on natural heritage, although more extensively documented, requires much more urgent action than is currently taken. We are in danger of entering of vicious cycle: Climate change affects biodiversity and, in turn, reduces the positive effect of biodiversity on climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The diversity of species and habitats is one of the foundations of life on earth and we must make every effort possible for the conservation and sustainable use of our natural heritage.

The Greek government convened last June an International Scientific Conference titled “Climate Change Impacts on Cultural Heritage: Facing the challenge”, with the participation of world renowned scientists from over 43 countries. The result of this conference was a proposal –with the support of the World Meteorological Organization and UNESCO- which the Greek Prime Minister presented at the September UN Climate Summit.

We are proud of the fact that this proposal has been supported by more than 60 countries so far and we hope that this number will increase significantly. Within this context, in 2020 we are convening in Athens a meeting of heads of states, governments and international organizations to present the overview of the joint proposal. The outcome of the collaboration will utilize the expertise of UNESCO on cultural heritage and of the WMO on all important meteorological and hydrological events.

The Ministry of Environment and Energy of Greece has already appointed Professor Zerefos as State Representative of Greece on Climate Change and Professor Synolakis as President of a Special Committee for Tackling Climate Change while the Ministry of Culture has appointed Professor Cartalis as Coordinator of the Group on “Climate Change and Cultural Heritage”.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation for your presence today and invite you to offer your support to the Greek Initiative, which views the effects of climate change through the lens of cultural and natural heritage. It is our duty to make every effort to protect these invaluable assets we inherited from our ancestors and to guarantee that we will bestow them to the next generations in the best possible condition.

Our cultural and natural heritage represents the history that has shaped our civilization, but also serves as a guiding light towards our future.