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Lina Mendoni: “We are starting to draw up the management plan for Mount Athos”



he start of the drafting of the management plan for Mount Athos, which UNESCO is requesting for all the monuments included in the world heritage list, was announced by the Minister of Culture of Greece, Ms. Lina Mendoni, speaking at the “Mount Athos: uniqueness, cultural heritage and environment” section of the 9th Delphi Economic Forum.

The Minister emphasised that Mount Athos has been on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1988, while the first stages of the project’s development began several years ago, and in 2011 the first core of the criteria was formed, which were presented and sent in 2014 to the World Heritage Committee.

“From then on, I can’t say that anything special has happened. We picked up the thread again after the pandemic with the previous Civil Administrator Mr. Athanasios Martinos and the current Civil Administrator Mr. Anastasios Mitsialis and always with the blessing and help of Geronda Elissaios we are slowly starting the

drafting of this management plan", emphasised the Culture Minister. At the same time, Ms. Mendoni expressed the conviction that not only the plan will not create problems in the autonomy of the monasteries and their decisions, but will give power "to all levels of administration, and to the community and to the governor and to the Greek state, in order to be able to protect all these values and principles that are transmitted on Mount Athos, in its daily life".

Ms. Mendoni characterised Mount Athos as a complex cultural and environmental asset that combines the built architectural environment, the natural landscape and the cultural landscape, as in the anthropogenic intervention in the natural landscape. There, as she said, is a unique wealth of 100,000 square meters of iconography in the monasteries of Athos, the largest collection of manuscripts in the world, the largest collection of documents and a core with a unique wealth of moveable monuments (from imperial and patriarchal tributes, sacred religious vessels to production tools), a unique living collection of Christianity spirituality.

His Excellency Mr. Giorgos Koumoutsakos, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Greece to UNESCO, underlined that "the registration of a cultural heritage monument on the UNESCO World Map is a source of joy and pride at the moment it is done, for the country that manages to register a monument". However, he emphasised that at the same time it is also a source of responsibility to preserve, strengthen and protect this good. "Now we must take the steps to support and honour what made us proud. It is the time for responsibility", he said and added that the overall management plan of the Mount Athos Community is a big challenge as "it does not only concern the environment but its institutional status which must remain untouched". Finally, he stated that he is certain that "the cooperation of the State, the Mount Athos Community, but also European and other institutions is the only way, based on respect for the status of Mount Athos.

The importance of the fire protection of Mount Athos was underlined by its Civil Administrator , Mr. Anastasios Mitsialis, who announced that a few days ago an important meeting was held on the subject with the participation of all involved bodies. "A process has been initiated through the Ministry of Civil Protection in collaboration with the Ministry of National Defence to enable the road network to reach the damage in time.

There, unfortunately, fires most of the time come from lightning and are usually in hard-to-reach places," he said and emphasised that decisions were made, while the planning of the Minister of Climate Crisis and Civil Protection includes the installation of a firefighting helicopter on the Kassandra peninsula, a short distance from Mount Athos. At the same time, the upgrading of the fire brigade and the

implementation of training programs for monks or workers are being promoted, in order to respond in the event of a forced evacuation if necessary.

“We have progressed in cooperation with the relevant bodies of the Greek state”, noted Geronda Elissaios Simonopetritis, Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Simonopetra of Mount Athos. He mentioned that many initiatives are working around Mount Athos and added that there is still a lot to be done. Speaking about the monastic state he noted: “Mount Athos is a champion in some unique singularities such as timelessness, the fact that it is the gateway into the life of the Byzantine commonwealth, its heritage wealth, its polyphony, its diversity, its linguistic and cultural diversity.”

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