

Information about the First Subregional Meeting “Conservation of the Geological Heritage in SE Europe”, Bulgaria, 6 - 12 May 1995

The First Subregional Meeting dedicated to the Protection and Conservation of the Geological Heritage in South-East Europe was organized thanks to the financial support of UNESCO, the help of the European Association for the Preservation of the Geological Heritage (ProGEO), and the active participation of scientists and nature protection institutes from all Balkan countries. All geological institutions of Bulgaria took active part in the organization; the assistance of the Geological Institute of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and of the National Museum “Man and Earth” (Sofia) should be especially mentioned.

Several points concerning the geological heritage of South-East Europe seem to be of special importance.

First of all, I wish to emphasize on the richness of South-East Europe in important geological sites that represent a part of the World Geological Heritage. The Balkan Peninsula has a complex geological structure. It is a result of superposition of geologic events during almost the whole geologic history of the Earth. Sites of purely geological interest and importance are often also prominent features of the landscape that represent places of incomparable natural beauty. Being insulated through natural processes (sometimes, surrounded by seas and their gulfs), many geological sites and their immediate surroundings cohabit with areas of endemic flora and fauna, forests, moors and other important biospheric features. The fertile plains and valleys of the subregion have been since the dark ages the cradle of different civilizations. People who lived in our subregion had the sense of natural beauty, and often worshipped magnificent majestic natural sites populating them with gods and their oracles. Some of the most beautiful natural sites have been chosen for the construction of monasteries, castles and fortresses. Thus, man completed the

harmony of Nature-created sites with his deeds, for the glory of God, or creating strongholds for his defence. Important geological sites were embellished with monuments of human civilizations.

Only few of the important geological sites of the Balkan Peninsula are included in the World Geological Heritage List (Fig. 1). Now, we have the opportunity to unite our efforts for the protection and conservation of the Geological Heritage of our countries and peoples. This is our unique chance to fulfill our duty to the future generations, and to preserve for them the heritage we are spoiling so light-heartedly.

Second, our subregion has been always a cross-road of civilizations, and a centre of disturbance and wars. In our days, it is again a place of danger, disturbance and economic insecurity. Unfortunately even at this meeting, some of the countries of the subregion were not present due to war and internal insecurity. In such conditions, society is not inclined to care for the natural and cultural heritage. It is urgent to attract the attention of Society towards the place the geological heritage should take together with the other elements of the natural and cultural heritage in the whole system of values. As an illustration of the neglect to these problems I would like to cite the lack of interest and response from the media to the repeated announcement of our meeting. In South-East Europe, we should really fight for to attract the attention of the governments, the media, companies, tourist organizations, the education system, and the whole society towards the problems of the geological heritage and its protection and conservation.

On the third place, the problems of the protection of the geological heritage are closely connected to the problems of the pollution of the environment, and the destruction through mining and industrial activities, tourism, etc. The

understanding of the widest circles of society is of paramount importance for the protection and conservation of any national heritage, and of the natural heritage in particular. The most important goal is to obtain the support of government, state and private companies, and of every citizen. It can be obtained only by a patient and long-lasting public campaign, beginning with the Kindergarten and primary school, and ending with the companies and governments.

Governments and the whole society should be persuaded that the important geological sites are an integral part of the natural, historic and cultural heritage of the nations. Thus, the protection of the geological sites should be made a part of the Government policy for ecology and preservation of the national heritage.

Mining and quarrying activities as well as road construction often lead to irreparable loss of important geological sites, as, e. g., rare mineral and rock deposits, unique petrologic and stratigraphic features, fossil sites, etc. On the other hand, these activities may lead to exposure of new and previously unknown important geological sites and deposits that should be preserved and conserved in a given state for to achieve maximum of informativeness. The destruction of important geological features (and/or geological sites) often leads to enormous pollution of the environment with by-products. Thus, the most important problem is to reach the brain and heart of each individual citizen. Even if the Government took a given important geological site under state protection, and erected a metal plaque with a suitable inscription; even if the companies made decisions to protect the important geological sites and to prevent the pollution of the environment with by-products, even then few irresponsible individuals would easily steal the plaque for to sell it as metal scrap or just for fun, would ruin the site spading for imaginary treasures or following vandal instincts, and would pollute the environment by laziness and lack of care. Thus, the problem of nature (including geological site) protection and conservation becomes in a uncivilized society a task for generations!

On the fourth place, geology developed comparatively late in our part of the world if compared with the classical geological countries. Our geology is comparatively little known, and the geological Sites of Special Scientific Importance are not so popular even with our geological communities. It is our duty to make an inventory of such geological sites that are also a common wealth for humanity.

Thus, the First Subregional Meeting is only a beginning towards more concentrated activities in the field of Nature protection and conservation. We have to open ourselves towards these problems, to attract the attention of our governments and general public, and to coordinate our efforts.

Amongst the aims of the meeting, the following should be specially mentioned:

- * Exchange of information about the important geological sites under protection in our countries

- * Exchange of information and ideas about the national policy of each country in the domain of nature conservation, and the place of the sites of geological interest in this policy

- * Exchange of information for to establish in the future a Balkan (or South-East Europe) List of Geological Heritage, and to choose the most important geological sites for to propose them to be included in the World Heritage List

- * Discussion on the basic features of the important geological sites that should be included in the national and Balkan heritage lists.

The Meeting fulfilled most of these goals, and adopted unanimously a resolution and declaration that are published hereafter. A subregional working group for the preservation of the geological heritage was formed, and it was later accepted by ProGEO as ProGEO Working Group 1. Most of the papers included in this issue have been reported to the Meeting, and some have been written specially on the occasion.

The present issue is organized into two parts. The first part contains papers of more general interest relative to different problems of the geological heritage. The IUGS Geosites form for Database on Geological Sites provides a tool for comparative study of the geological sites, and some comments and proposals are added from the viewpoint of the Balkan geologists. Another article (W. Wimbledon) gives assistance to the national site selection. The progress in the management for conservation of geotopes in Europe (W. Krieg), the influence potential of physical planning (B. Stürm), problems of environmental education (A. Marcopoulo-Diacantoni), international and national legislation concerning geosite protection (B. Stürm, A. Andrasanu, I. Drandaki & K. Kassioumis), and specific problems of the geological sites of special scientific importance (I. Zagorchev, Tz. Tzankov) discuss important facets of the problems relative to geosite protection in all their diversity. The second part is dedicated to the national lists of the geological

heritage including geosites that are still not under protection. Very soon these lists will be enlarged, and will serve as the basis for the compilation of the Balkan Geological Heritage List. Another issue will be dedicated to specific papers relative to protected sites proposed for inclusion in the World Geological Heritage List, or in the Balkan Geological Heritage List.

We hope that the First Subregional Meeting has been only the first step towards a wider cooperation in the field of the protection of our precious natural heritage!

Ivan Zagorchev
ProGEO-1 Co-ordinator

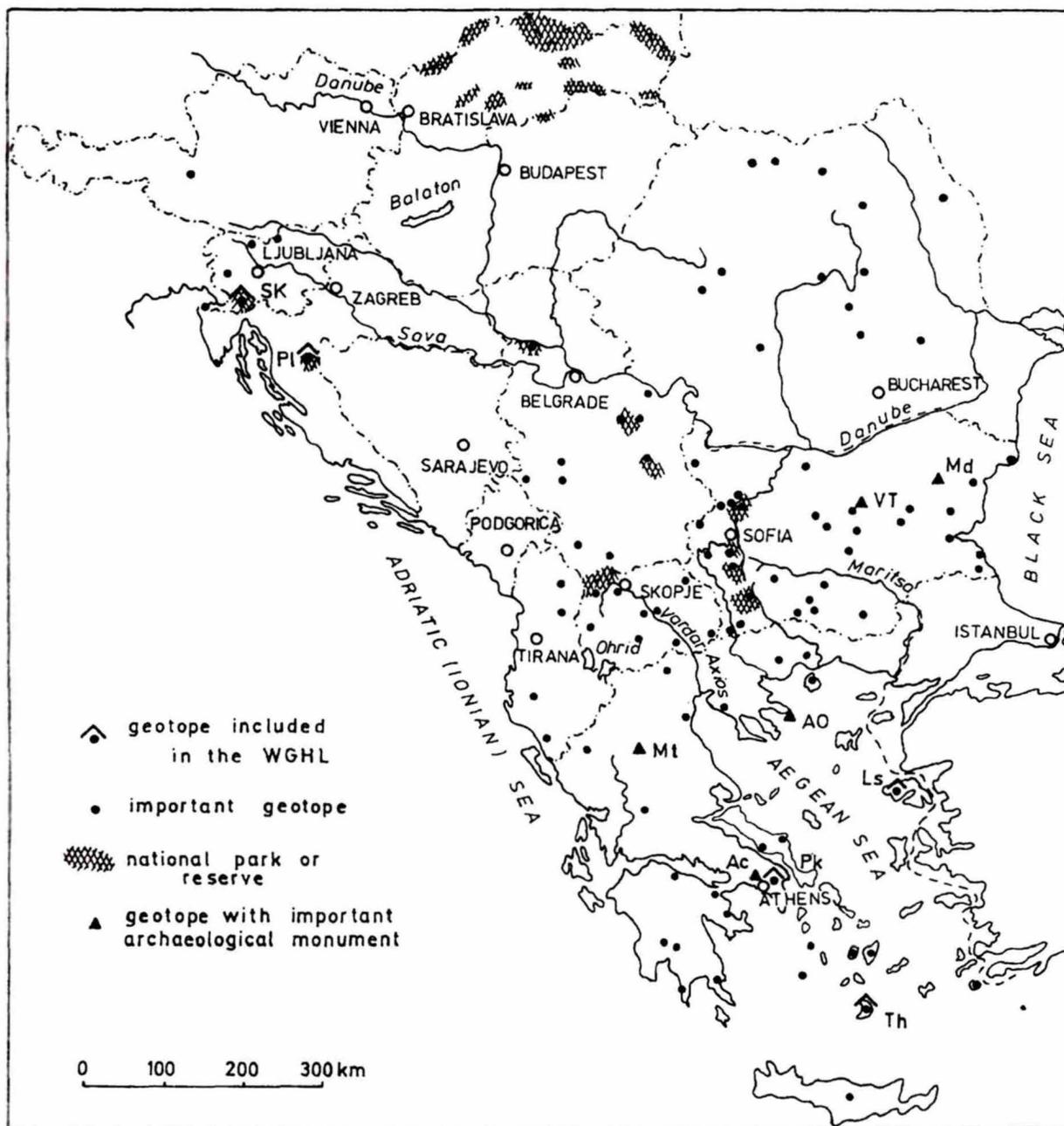


Fig. 1. Location map for some of the geotopes in Southeast Europe.

Geotopes included in the World Geological Heritage List: SK – Skocjan Cave; PI – Plitvice National Park; Ls – petrified forest on Lesvos; Pk – Pikermi site of Neogene mammal fauna; Th – volcanic island of Thyra (Santorini). Geotopes with important archaeological monuments: Ac – Acropolis in Athens; Mt – Meteora with the mediaeval monasteries; VT – Veliko-Turnovo, capital of the Second Bulgarian Empire; Md – Madara plateau with the Madara Horseman (First Bulgarian Empire) and the Thracian and Proto-Bulgarian sanctuaries.

Resolution of the First Subregional Meeting “Conservation of the Geological Heritage in South-East Europe”

The participants in the First Subregional Conference “Conservation of the Geological Heritage in South-East Europe” believe

that the geological heritage is an integral and important part of the natural and cultural heritage of our countries and peoples,

that, especially in the conditions of transition towards a market economy, basic values are often neglected, and that the nature (geological heritage included) protection and conservation have to be an essential part of the cultural and environmental policy of the states involved,

that there is a need for co-ordinated efforts of the South-East European countries in the field of geological heritage protection and conservation,

adopt a joint declaration based on the principles of the International Declaration of the Rights of the Memory of the Earth (Digne Declaration) and on the Convention concerning the protection of cultural and natural heritage,

agree to propose an international project for the establishment of a List of the Geological Heritage of South-East Europe, and the corresponding inventory based on national proposals and expert reviewing, in close collaboration with the European Association for the Conservation of the Geological Heritage (ProGEO) and with UNESCO, and to **organize** for that purpose and for **co-ordination on the subregional scale a committee** with representatives of all countries involved,

appeal for the introduction of geology and of the problems of nature protection and geotope conservation in school curricula,

and **support efforts towards a full integration** of geological and geomorphological site (geotope) protection in national and European legislation and initiatives for biodiversity and landscape conservation, as well as consideration of strengthening legislation.

Sofia - Belogradchik - Melnik - Bansko
signed at Bansko, 12 May 1995

Declaration of the First Subregional Meeting “Conservation of the Geological Heritage in South-East Europe”

The peoples of South-East Europe have received a precious natural and cultural heritage. It is our duty to protect and preserve this heritage for future generations.

The past of the Earth is no less important than that of human beings. The destruction of cultural monuments is a crime against humanity although a man-made monument can be restored. No element of the geological heritage can ever be restored if damaged or destroyed, and any loss of that kind is irreversible.

We and governments are only the custodians of the heritage of the Earth. Every public body, company and citizen should understand the value of this heritage. We appeal to the information media to bring the problems of nature (including geological) heritage protection and conservation to every home and citizen, and to the ministries of education, to integrate these problems in the school curricula.

All geological and geomorphological sites (geotopes) are unique in some ways, but some sites of scientific interest or/and of aesthetic value are outstanding and can be considered as unique and worthy of special care. The significance of the sites varies from international on the world scale, through regional and national, to those of local significance only. Our countries need to develop their national lists of the geological heritage, and on the basis of the most prominent features, to establish the Geological Heritage List of South-East Europe. In collaboration with the International Union of the Geological Sciences and UNESCO, each country should take steps for the identification, protection and management of the important geological sites including those of educational significance, of purely scientific importance, and those of aesthetic importance that make the unique harmony of geological record, beautiful landforms, biospheric diversity and cultural monuments.

The present state of the geological heritage evokes the need for the full integration of geological and geomorphological site protection into national and European legislation. We appeal to the governments and citizens of our countries to support our efforts and to take part in a broad international co-operation for the protection and conservation of the geological heritage.

Bansko, 12 May 1995