

in Thessaloniki. The Greek colleagues were surprised by the conservation team's rather minimalist approach to retouches on some of the icons. They also completely disagreed with the loss compensation on one of the icons, claiming that it would hardly be acceptable to the general public.⁹ The parties involved, however, showed a genuine willingness to cooperate. The commission was then sent to Thessaloniki to discuss this issue. This was followed by a visit to Sofia by the Director of the European Centre for Byzantine Studies. A common point of view was eventually reached.

Big projects like the one under discussion are tightly related to planning, but keeping strictly to schedule in this project was not always easy. Several months after the start of work, the commission encountered a delay in the scheduled conservation operations for some of the icons. In the case of two of the icons, the delay was caused by the need to conduct extra tests in order to guarantee the successful transfer of the paint layers. The conservators found new possibilities for intervention, which required more time than planned but ensured a more ethical approach. In another case, the delay was because insufficient time had been allocated for the conservation work.

The Director of the National Art Gallery in Sofia, who was quite closely involved in the project implementation, was replaced during the project. The conservation studios were moved to a new building. All of these facts had a negative effect on the coordination of the project. The deadline for completion of the conservation work was postponed. With hindsight, it is easy to see that the delay was also partly caused by the lack of sufficient equipment at the conservation laboratory. Although there was some improvement when the conservation studios moved to the new premises, part of the planned equipment was still lacking.

Project management was another underestimated element in this project. In order to ensure a smooth overall process, a proper management scheme should have been worked out in advance. It would also have been advisable to appoint a general manager of the project: it would have been much easier for a person in this position to plan, communicate with the partners, minimize possible conflict situations and to coordinate the project activities more successfully. The role of proper conservation planning and conservation management is still underestimated in Bulgaria (and not only in Bulgaria). This is probably related to some people's outdated perception of conservation as purely a craft. Nowadays conservation is a complex set of activities which requires university-level education,¹⁰ proficiency in different scientific disciplines and wide theoretical knowledge, along with refined practical skills. This complex aspect of the profession requires permanent interaction with many other professions and a specific approach to planning. One of the positive elements of the project is the fact that conservators were actively involved in the decision-making process through open discussions and dialogue. This is a modern approach and it shows an advance in the understanding of the role of the profession.