



PHOTO: 'Lights and Shadows in the Balkans' includes works by photographers from Balkan countries. From left: Stanko Abadzic of Croatia, Milomir Kovacevic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Nina Nikolov of Bulgaria.



Local exhibition gathers Balkan photographs to city

The current exhibition at the **Beyoğlu Municipality Art Gallery** is part of the **Intercultural Art Dialogues**, where cultural diversity is seen as a source of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship. A second exhibition in **Beyoğlu**, features churches of the Greek Orthodox in Istanbul before the Tanzimat

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Within the framework of the **Beyoğlu Municipality Intercultural Art Dialogues**, an exhibition in cooperation with the Hellenic Culture Foundation has opened at the municipality's art gallery on İstiklal Avenue. "Lights and Shadows in the Balkans" includes some 80 works by eight photographers from Balkan countries.

Perhaps it is fitting that Istanbul is one of the stops for this traveling exhibition. People tend to forget that Ottoman Turks played a part in the history of the Balkans from 1354 when they first began to establish themselves in southeastern Europe until 1804 as more and more of the Balkan countries began to declare their independence thanks to the winds of the French Revolution. Either the Ottomans subjected the lands to direct rule or allowed the people to be subject to their own rulers although that often resulted in revolts and war.

Scholars point to population movements that occurred under the Ottomans for a number of today's disagreements over territory. Two such issues that are still festering today are Kosovo and Macedonia. Under the Ottomans some groups expanded or were moved beyond their original homelands and since the Ottomans were quite accustomed to ethnically mixed populations, there was little conflict; however, with the end of Ottoman rule, some ethnic groups wanted to retain their ethnic identity and return to their original homelands that had come to be occupied by others. That conflict is still with us today, although often portrayed as religious in nature.

The exhibition as part of the Intercultural Art Dialogue can trace its roots to 2008 when the European Commission began to emphasize "intercultural" activities. A definition was attempted in 2006 at the Council of Europe forum. Intercultural dialogue was defined as "an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures that leads to a deeper understanding of the other's world perception."



CHURCH: The photos in the exhibition will no doubt surprise many who have never been inside a Greek Orthodox church. The exhibition is open in the afternoons.

Intercultural dialogue is centered at the municipal level where cultural diversity is seen as a source of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship and how this can become a positive force releasing new energy and resources for the development of cities. Such dialogue can lead to combining different cultural skills and attributes, to new and divergent thinking and can be a catalyst for action. Moreover there can be connections between cultural diversity and innovation and thriving and prosperous urban communities. In Istanbul it has been the **Beyoğlu Municipality** that has been putting the concept to good use in its art gallery for instance. The municipality sees this as a means of displaying the area's rich history and providing a place where the cultures of the world as expressed in art can be brought together. It is also a platform for showing off Turkish culture, art and artists to the rest of the world. The municipality also intends to extend its interest in the intercultural art dialogue to the plastic arts, classical arts, music, theater and cinema among others.

The current photography exhibition is meant to ensure that intercultural dialogue among the peoples of southeastern Europe is carried out in peace. The organization for the exhibition has come from the Greek Culture Foundation. Its president, Professor Georgios Babiniotis, has said that it was organized and supported in the interest of encouraging intercultural dialogue. He has said the Balkans have been the scene of

invasions, migrations, rebellions and many different cultures over its long history.

According to Babiniotis, the eight photographers are from eight different Balkan countries in an attempt to determine the desire for cooperation and exchanges of viewpoints and the common elements among their cultures. Each of the artists offers photographs from different areas and these show the daily life of the Balkan peoples modified by modern artistic influences and individual creativity and experience.

The artists who have united to accomplish this goal are Stelios Efstathopoulos (Greece), Nina Nikolova (Bulgaria), Bevis Fusha (Albania), Stanko Abadzic (Croatia), Imre Szabo (Serbia), Virgil Mlesnia (Romania), Timurtaş Onan (Turkey) and Milomir Kovacevic (Bosnia). They express the idea of pushing to the fore cooperation, the exchange of ideas and the common points among the cultures. The curator is Magdalena Michailidou.

There are considerable differences in the perceptions of these photographers. They generally work in black and white but one can easily see their differences by visiting the gallery.

Greek churches in an age of reform

Although not explicitly described as part of the Intercultural Dialogue, the photography exhibition that opened this week at the Greek Consulate General on İstiklal Avenue certainly could be included under that rubric.

Under the Ottomans, minorities such as the Greek Orthodox, the Armenians and the Jews were granted their own leaders and allowed to conduct their business by themselves unless a Muslim was involved. Following the conquest of Istanbul by the Ottomans in 1453, some of the Byzantine churches were converted into mosques. At the same time, the Christian minorities and Jews worked to repair many of their places of worship out of concern that they would be confiscated. The Ottomans, however, restricted these to repairs and did not permit the building of new churches.

Zafer Karaca, a Byzantine scholar, is the guiding light behind the exhibition on Greek Orthodox churches in Istanbul before the Tanzimat (Ottoman reform period of 1836 to 1856). He has prepared a brochure in Turkish and English that is an excellent summary of the situation in Istanbul prior to the Tanzimat and during that period. Moreover he clearly describes the interiors of Greek Orthodox churches. Photographic examples of churches are shown as well as a drawing of the architecture.

The photos in the exhibition will no doubt surprise many who have never been inside a Greek Orthodox church. The exhibition is open from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday and from noon to 8 p.m. Saturday and Sunday at the Sismanoglu Megaro (İstiklal Cad. No.60). The exhibition ends Feb. 21.