

To: President of the European Council, Mr. Charles Michel
Cc: Head of Task Force for Relations with the United Kingdom, Mr. Michel Barnier

*«What does Shakespeare mean to England?
Saint Paul's cathedral?
What does the Taj Mahal mean to India?
What do the paintings in the Sistine Chapel mean to Italy?
The Parthenon marbles are our pride. They are our identity.
They are today's link with Greek Excellence.
They are creations synonymous with our concepts of democracy and freedom.»*

Melina Merkouri

Recent reports based on a leaked draft document of the new EU-UK trade deal claim that a new paragraph was negotiated regarding the return “unlawfully removed cultural objects”¹. Early reports linked this paragraph with the Parthenon Marbles, despite being dismissed as unfounded, we feel obliged to stress our undeniable support to the cause of the reunification of the Parthenon Marbles.

They are not merely marbles, meaning just limestone composed by recrystallized carbonate minerals, they are sculptures. Sculptures of high cultural value for Greece and irrefutable part of Greece's heritage. The Parthenon itself is a world-renowned monument, a symbol of our earliest traces of civilization and essential concepts of polity in the European peninsula. A remnant of the golden age that was marked with the birth of the notion of a union (Delian League) and the production of some of the most influential and enduring cultural artefacts of the Western tradition.

The citadel of Acropolis, also inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage catalogue² and characterized as Statement of Outstanding Universal Value for World Heritage³, stands for centuries above Athens with Parthenon being the most famous of its parts and despite the numerous catastrophes, it faced throughout history no other can be compared with those during the late 17th - early 19th century. An explosion during the Morean War that almost decimated

¹<https://www.businessinsider.com/brexit-eu-to-ask-uk-to-return-elgin-marbles-to-greece-in-trade-talks-2020-2?r=US&IR=T>
<https://www.economist.com/britain/2020/02/20/will-britain-lose-the-elgin-marbles>
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8016687/EU-warns-returning-ELGIN-MARBLES-price-trade-deal.html>

<https://news.co.uk/news/politics/elgin-marbles-greece-brexit-negotiations-parthenon-british-museum-1883830>
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/feb/23/the-guardian-view-on-the-parthenon-marbles-not-just-a-brexit-sideshow>

² <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/404/>

³ UNESCO World Heritage Committee, Adoption of Retrospective Statements of Outstanding Universal Value, Decision: 39 COM 8E, 2015, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/6407>

the magnificent monument, which was being used as gunpowder storage and an attempted pillage that destroyed significant sculptures. What followed though was the most devastating, as it left an open wound for all generations to follow. Thomas Bruce, seventh Earl of Elgin and 11th Earl of Kincardine sought and gained permission in 1801 and for almost a decade, he dismantled large pieces of the monument and transferred them to England. After his bankruptcy, he sold the sculptures to the British public for a lavish price. Since then they are kept in the British museum, separated from their emblematic starting point. This unprecedented and treacherous act that would today qualify as a war crime against cultural heritage⁴ lives in infamy as all calls to the British museum have fallen on deaf ears and efforts from international agencies for mediation did not produce an outcome. On top of that, international media keep referring to the sculptures by the name of the thief that deprived them from the homeland. There is a whole generation of Greeks growing up in the crisis that will not have the chance to visit London and the British museum.

Being faithful to the obligations of the Union arising from article 167 TFEU to conserve and safeguard cultural heritage of European significance and despite the temporal scope's limitation (*ratione temporis*) of directive 2014/60/EU of 15 May 2014, we reiterate our call for the reunification of the marbles, as soon as possible, and we support any claims put forward as part of the trade deal or any process initiated thereof.

Supporting MEPs:

Alexis Georgoulis (GUE/NGL)

Stelios Kypouropoulos (EPP)

Loucas Furlas (EPP)

Lefteris Christoforou (EPP)

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Clare Daly (GUE/NGL)

Dimitris Papadimoulis (GUE/NGL)

Kouloglou Stelios (GUE/NGL)

Costas Mavrides (S&D)

⁴ UNESCO General Conference's resolution 38 C/48 - Strategy for the Reinforcement of UNESCO's Actions for the Protection of Culture and the Promotion of Cultural Pluralism in the Event of Armed Conflict, 2 November 2015, see <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000235186> ; Security Council, Resolution on the protection of cultural heritage, A dopted at its 7907th meeting on 24 March 2017, S/RES/2347 (2017), [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2347\(2017\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2347(2017)).

José Gusmão (GUE/NGL)

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