

ΕΠΑΝΕΝΩΣΗ ΤΩΝ ΓΛΥΠΤΩΝ ΤΟΥ ΠΑΡΘΕΝΩΝΑ  
REUNIFICATION OF THE PARTHENON SCULPTURES



Π Ρ Α Κ Τ Ι Κ Α \* P R O C E E D I N G S

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Διεθνής Ένωση για την Επανάωση  
των Γλυπτών του Παρθενώνα  
International Association for the  
Reunification of the Parthenon Sculptures

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ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΜΑΡΙΑΝΝΑ Β. ΒΑΡΔΙΝΟΓΙΑΝΝΗ  
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ΑΠΟ ΤΗ ΣΚΟΠΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΒΕΤΙΚΗΣ ΕΠΙΤΡΟΠΗΣ

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Dear Secretary-General Dr Vlazaki,

Dear Deputy Minister of Culture Mr Stratis,

Dear President of the Acropolis Museum Professor Pandermalis,

Distinguished colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

First of all, I would like to say that we can all feel heartened by several turning points over the past year which have led to the issue of the reunification of the Parthenon Sculptures gaining broader coverage in the international press and on the political scene in various countries. In June 2018 the Labour opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn pledged to return the Parthenon Marbles to Greece if he became Prime Minister. Then there is the issue of Brexit which has done a lot to revive controversy over the Marbles being kept in Britain, with articles in the British press espousing arguments such as the paradoxical nature of the British Museum claiming to be a museum of the world when the British government wants to get rid of freedom of movement, or that returning the Marbles would help to build bridges post-Brexit. In November, a report commissioned by President Macron recommended the full restitution by French museums of works in their collections which were taken without consent from former African colonies, thereby lifting the sacrosanct principle of the inalienability of national collections. During the same month the *Sunday Times*, a long-time bastion of the English Establishment, published an article in which Sarah Baxter, the newspaper's Deputy Editor, supported the return of the Marbles to Greece where "they belong". And in December, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution brought by Dr Artemis Papatheanasiou, Legal Advisor at the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for the return or restitution of cultural property to countries of origin.

Clearly the repatriation debate has gained momentum and pressure is mounting on the British Museum. Tomorrow our International Association will be meeting to elect the new Executive Board and if we are to harness the positive momentum of recent events we must ensure that we all speak with one voice. When engaging in discussions with the Greek Government, with the British Government or with other decision-makers, the only way to effectively exert pressure and wield influence is by adopting a common strategy. To date our Association has been divided amongst those in favour of litigation and those who advocate negotiation and dialogue. We all agree on our ultimate objective, the return of the Parthenon Marbles to Greece, but we are not all on the same page regarding the means to that end. To explain why I feel so strongly that negotiation should prevail over litigation, I would like to quote the historian Thucydides: “For you know, as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is in question only between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”<sup>1</sup> This advice given by one of the greatest ancient Greek historians is still valid today!

We have to clearly define our priorities and our target. Our new President, in collaboration with the Association Board, should formulate a strategy which we are to pursue together. Otherwise, we will have no impact on governments, which are our targets, on Parliament, the media, and in particular on the general public whose opinion influences political and cultural actors. This is the first important point I wish to mention. I think the second point is how to organize our discussions with different targets, how to promote our ideas and also how to put pressure on public opinion, on the different media. Following a useful form of lobbying often applied in the United States, we could invite our members to send letters to their governments, to their parliamentary representatives and other public authorities, and of course to the British authorities, in order to sensitize them to public opinion on the issue of return. This implies setting up a centralized database containing the results of opinion polls and articles on the subject of the reunification of the Parthenon Marbles.

At the same time, we must emphasize that the Parthenon Marbles are a unique case and therefore the claim for their return does not set a dangerous

1. Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Melian Dialogue, V (89), 431 BC.

precedent. Like the different shots of a film, this succession of images carved in marble by Phidias reproduce scenes from the Golden Age of Pericles. Therefore they cannot be perceived as a set of individual sculptures but as an inseparable, artistic whole which is only truly meaningful when reunified.

Finally, I would like to stress the important role to be played by the European Union in our international campaign. As you know, in 2013 the Swiss Committee organized a roundtable discussion at the European Parliament in Brussels entitled “The reunification of the Parthenon Marbles, a European concern”. Without any doubt, it is our European culture, which has its roots in Ancient Greece, and of which the Parthenon Marbles are the major symbol, which has contributed the most to the development of our Western and universal culture. At the same time, we should use all channels available to influence the United Nations, UNESCO and NGOs, as well as political and social actors. More specifically, we should mobilize intellectuals, well-known writers, film producers and actors. We should exploit the power of the social media. And if we wish to efficiently mobilize multiple actors and decision-makers, we will have to attract sponsors.

Thank you for your kind attention.

## Π

### ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η Ελβετική Επιτροπή για την Επανάσταση των Γλυπτών του Παρθενώνα υποστηρίζει ότι θα πρέπει να χρησιμοποιηθεί η ευνοϊκή διεθνής συγκυρία όσον αφορά τον επαναπατρισμό έργων τέχνης, προκειμένου να αυξηθεί η πίεση προς το Βρετανικό Μουσείο. Οι επερχόμενες εκλογές στη Διεθνή Ένωση αποτελούν ευκαιρία για την υιοθέτηση μιας κοινής στρατηγικής, μιας ενιαίας φωνής. Σύμφωνα με την Ελβετική Επιτροπή, και ακολουθώντας τη συμβουλή του αρχαίου Έλληνα ιστορικού Θουκυδίδη, η στρατηγική αυτή θα πρέπει να εστιάσει μάλλον στη διαπραγμάτευση παρά στη δικαστική επίλυση, λαμβάνοντας επίσης υπόψη ότι η επανάσταση των Γλυπτών αφορά ως σύμβολο τον δυτικό πολιτισμό και την ίδια την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση. Τέλος, η επιστράτευση προσωπικοτήτων και η εκμετάλλευση της ισχύος της κοινής γνώμης και των ΜΜΕ είναι απαραίτητα προκειμένου να ασκηθεί πίεση στα κέντρα λήψης αποφάσεων.