



Plenary sitting

B9-0170/2024

11.3.2024

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Commission

pursuant to Rule 132(2) of the Rules of Procedure

on the return of Romanian national treasure illegally appropriated by Russia
(2024/2605(RSP))

**Cristian Terheş, Anna Fotyga, Kosma Złotowski, Witold Jan
Waszczykowski, Anna Zalewska, Jadwiga Wiśniewska, Adam Bielan,
Eugen Jurzyca**
on behalf of the ECR Group

B9-0170/2024

**European Parliament resolution on the return of Romanian national treasure illegally appropriated by Russia
(2024/2605(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 6 and 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to the Preamble to and to Articles 2, 3, 4 and 21 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU),
- having regard to the Preamble to and Article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, to the First Protocol thereto, as applicable to occupied territories, and to the Second Protocol thereto, on the enhanced protection of cultural property,
- having regard to Article 8(2) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court
- having regard to the Council of Europe Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property (Nicosia Convention),
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December 1948,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 21 June 2021 on the EU approach to cultural heritage in conflicts and crises,
- having regard to the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 16 November 1972,
- having regard to the UNESCO Declaration Concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage of 17 October 2003,
- having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 16 December 1966,
- having regard to the 2015 report on ‘Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe’¹,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 22 May 2018 entitled ‘Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies’ (COM(2018)0268),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 22 May 2018 entitled ‘A New

¹ Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe Consortium, [‘Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe Final Report’](#), June 2015.

European Agenda for Culture' (COM(2018)0267),

- having regard to the Commission communication of 14 November 2017 entitled 'Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture – The European Commission's contribution to the Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg, 17 November 2017' (COM(2017)0673),
- having regard to the United Nations Declaration of Principles of International Cultural Co-operation,
- having regard to the Rome Declaration of 25 March 2017, endorsed by the leaders of the 27 Member States and of the European Council, the European Parliament and the Commission,
- having regard to its previous resolution of 17 September 2020 on the cultural recovery of Europe²,
- having regard to its resolution of 14 December 2022 on the implementation of the New European Agenda for Culture and the EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations³,
- having regard to its resolution of 5 July 2017 entitled 'Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations'⁴,
- having regard to its resolution of 20 January 2021 on achieving an effective policy legacy for the European Year of Cultural Heritage⁵,
- having regard to its resolution of 17 January 2019 on cross-border restitution claims of works of art and cultural goods looted in armed conflicts and wars⁶,
- having regard to its resolution of 11 December 2018 on the New European Agenda for Culture⁷,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 22 January 2018 on the integrated approach to external conflicts and crises,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 8 June 2018 on the need to bring cultural heritage to the fore across policies in the EU⁸,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 13 December 2022 on the EU Action Plan against Trafficking in Cultural Goods (COM(2022)0800),
- having regard to the final declaration of the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022,

² OJ C 385, 22.9.2021, p. 152.

³ OJ C 177, 17.5.2023, p. 78.

⁴ OJ C 334, 19.9.2018, p. 112.

⁵ OJ C 456, 10.11.2021, p. 24.

⁶ OJ C 411, 27.11.2020, p. 125.

⁷ OJ C 388, 13.11.2020, p. 30.

⁸ OJ C 196, 8.6.2018, p. 20.

- having regard to Petition No 1168/2023 by Mihai Igna (Romanian), on behalf of the Association ‘Together we bring prosperity’ (Impreuna aducem bunastare), asking for the restitution of Romanian national treasure and historical archives from Russia,
 - having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas culture has an intrinsic value as an expression of humanity, democracy and civic engagement, which can be key to advancing sustainable development;
 - B. whereas Europe is a community of cultures and unique cultural heritage based on shared values, history and continued integration;
 - C. whereas cultural heritage constitutes one of the basic elements of civilisation, given, for example, its symbolic value and that it represents humankind’s cultural memory of uniting people; whereas culture and cultural heritage have great potential for promoting the values of the European Union, for strengthening its diverse identities and for helping to achieve its goals at a global level, as well as for contributing to solving global challenges;
 - D. whereas the cultural dimension of European integration remains by far the least developed dimension as regards the active involvement, or rather lack thereof, of the European institutions;
 - E. whereas the looting and illicit destruction of cultural heritage pose a major threat to what makes Europe unique, namely its long-standing and varied cultures and cultural heritage;
 - F. whereas the Romanian national treasure is a collection of valuable cultural, religious and historical objects, gold treasure weighing 91.48 tonnes, valued today at over EUR 5 billion, royal collections of jewels and rare coins, as well as historical archives; whereas according to an agreement between Romania and the Kremlin, Russia was to keep this treasure safe until its return to Romania was possible; whereas in early 1918, the new Soviet Government severed all diplomatic relations with Romania and confiscated the Romanian national treasure, resulting in parts of it, including all of the gold treasure, being illegally held by Russia up to the present day;
 - G. whereas a Romanian-Russian Joint Commission was created to discuss the restitution of the Romanian national treasure and was active between 2003 and 2019; whereas during Joint Commission meetings, evidence was presented by the Romanian delegates regarding the Romanian national treasure held in Moscow, including the original documents concerning the transfer to Russia of the gold treasure, which had been kept by the National Bank of Romania⁹, under the condition that it would be returned at the end of the conflict; whereas this evidence was not contested by Russia, which acknowledged its duty to return the treasure;
 - H. whereas the Romanian national treasure holds immense historical and cultural value for the people of Romania, who seek its restitution, which would allow for justice and

⁹ National Bank of Romania, ‘[One century of the unfinished history of the NBR’s Treasure in Moscow](#)’, accessed 11 March 2024.

historic reparation following the treasure's illegal confiscation and their being prevented from accessing their rightful heritage;

- I. whereas other European countries also experienced looting by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union simultaneously; whereas it has been estimated that over 516 000 works of art from Poland were stolen or damaged during the Second World War due to systematic looting by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Red Army, including by specialised 'trophy brigades'; whereas Poland has submitted about 20 requests to the Russian authorities for the return of thousands of items stolen during the Second World War; whereas the requests submitted by Poland to Russia in September 2022 included a formal restitution request for the return of seven paintings which Soviet forces stole from museums and palaces and which can be now traced to the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow;
- J. whereas the restitution of cultural heritage unlawfully removed from a country of origin is crucial for the preservation and appreciation of cultural diversity and for the protection of the universal value of cultural heritage;
- K. whereas Russia's actions concerning the Romanian national treasure are not isolated; whereas numerous European nations, such as Poland, Ukraine and Latvia, have experienced similarly abusive actions from Russia over the centuries;
- L. whereas the fight against Russian imperialism and aggression must encompass efforts towards the restitution and preservation of European cultural heritage, including the Romanian national treasure;
- M. whereas Russia has demonstrated a pattern of aggression, not only by seeking to expand its territorial influence but also by destroying our common European identity, our values and our European heritage;
- N. whereas Article 167(1) TFEU states that the EU must 'contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore'; whereas it also specifies that the EU can achieve this by 'encouraging cooperation between Member States' and, if necessary, by 'supporting and supplementing their action' in specific areas; whereas these areas include the 'improvement of the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples' and the 'conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage of European significance';
- O. whereas the EU, as an international organisation with personality under international law (Article 47 TEU), may maintain relations with other organisations and should attach particular importance to cooperation with the UN and its specialised organisations, as well as to concluding international agreements;
- P. whereas Article 167(4) TFEU also adds that the EU 'shall take cultural aspects into account in its action under other provisions of the Treaties';
- Q. whereas in the Rome Declaration of 25 March 2017, EU leaders pledged to work towards a 'Union which preserves our cultural heritage and promotes cultural diversity';

- R. whereas in 2012, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted Resolution 1896 entitled ‘The honouring of obligations and commitments by the Russian Federation’, asking the Russian Federation to continue efforts to rapidly settle outstanding issues regarding the return of cultural and other property by direct negotiation with the countries concerned;
- S. whereas the UN Declaration of Principles of International Cultural Co-operation affirms that cultural heritage is a part of the common heritage of humanity and should be returned to its rightful owners when removed without their consent;
- T. whereas the destruction and looting of cultural heritage in armed conflicts constitute serious attacks against human dignity and human rights;
- U. whereas the study requested by the European Parliament’s Committee on Culture and Education in 2022¹⁰, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, presents a new perspective on cultural heritage which must be regarded also as an issue intrinsically linked to human rights; whereas this perspective has legal implications for the EU;
- V. whereas the protection of cultural heritage has also been recognised as a human rights issue by the UN General Assembly¹¹, and the human dimension of cultural heritage was fully endorsed in the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- W. whereas the 2022 report by the European External Action Service (EEAS) on progress in the implementation of the ‘Concept on Cultural Heritage in conflicts and crises’ highlights the EU’s level of support for the protection of cultural heritage in conflicts and crises, including the war in Ukraine, through various means¹²;
- X. whereas the Committee of Petitions has only recently discussed Petition No 1168/2023 asking for the restitution of the Romanian national treasure and historical archives from Russia, which brought this issue to the EU’s attention;
1. Expresses grave concern over the status of the Romanian national treasure, which is a collection of priceless cultural, religious and historical artefacts of European heritage, and deplores deeply the fact that it has been unlawfully held by Russia for over a century;
 2. Urges Russia to immediately and unconditionally return the Romanian national treasure to Romania and to the Romanian people and to pay the penalties and interest accrued for the period during which the Romanian people were deprived of enjoying what was rightfully theirs;
 3. Takes note of the efforts by the Romanian Government and the National Bank of Romania to seek the restitution of the Romanian national treasure through diplomatic

¹⁰ Study – ‘Protecting cultural heritage from armed conflicts in Ukraine and beyond’, European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, 21 March 2023.

¹¹ UN General Assembly Resolution 52/145 of 6 March 1998 entitled ‘Situation of human rights in Afghanistan’.

¹² EEAS, ‘[Concept on Cultural heritage in conflicts and crises – A component for peace and security in European Union’s external action](#)’, 19 April 2021.

means and international cooperation;

4. Recalls that cultural heritage constitutes an integral part of the identity of a nation; condemns, therefore, the unlawful removal and trafficking of cultural objects;
5. Urges Russia to return the works of art and treasure which it stole from Poland, including those stolen during its occupation of Poland and those which had first been seized by German forces and were then subsequently taken by the Soviet Union; calls on the international community to support Poland's 20 restitution claims submitted to Russia for thousands of objects;
6. Reminds Russia that the plunder of cultural goods has no statute of limitation, legally or ethically; calls on the Commission to adopt a 'once stolen – always stolen' approach when dealing with looted works of art;
7. Welcomes the efforts by certain Member States to return cultural works and artefacts to their places of origin as part of their external policy strategy, in order to foster mutual understanding of one another's cultural heritage, as well as to support the development of autonomous cultural policies in non-EU countries; calls on the Commission and the EEAS to actively support those Member States in their negotiating processes with non-EU countries using a holistic approach and to actively support the efforts of all Member States with regard to the protection and reparations of their cultural and historical heritage, in line with the MONDIACULT 2022 declaration;
8. Calls on the Commission, the Council, the EEAS and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to provide proactive assistance and support to the Romanian authorities in their endeavours to secure the restitution of the national treasure; notes that, in order to bring justice to the Romanian people, these endeavours should also include measures to impose penalties on and collect accrued interest from Russia;
9. Calls on the Commission and the Council to incorporate cultural considerations and the restitution of national heritage in the external actions of the EU, particularly in their activities relating to Russia;
10. Calls for the EU to maintain relations with other international organisations and to attach particular importance to cooperating with the UN and its specialised organisations, in particular UNESCO, in order to support the efforts of Member States to locate and recover looted art and national treasure;
11. Calls on UNESCO and other relevant organisations to help secure the return of cultural items which were looted in the First and Second World Wars and have not been returned;
12. Calls on the Commission to present a strategy for the restitution of the archives and the national treasure of Romania, which are still unlawfully in Russia's possession;
13. Calls for the EU institutions to take measures to protect and preserve cultural heritage and to combat illicit trafficking and the destruction of cultural heritage;

14. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the European External Action Service.