



Rt. Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street,
London
SW1A 2AA
United Kingdom

Brussels, 3 November 2020

Honourable Prime minister,
Dear Mr. Johnson,

As Members of the European Parliament, we are encouraged by the efforts to negotiate a positive future relationship between the UK and EU27. We echo your comments that the United Kingdom and European Union have a unique opportunity to redefine our partnership.

Relationships are more than legal documents, and we now see an opportunity for your government to send a signal to the world that the United Kingdom, whilst respecting your history, is looking to a post Brexit future with renewed confidence.

In that spirit, we respectfully ask that you initiate formal efforts for the return of the Parthenon Sculptures currently held in the British Museum to the Acropolis Museum in Athens.

Britain, the Hellenic Republic, and all nations in the West, are children of ancient Greece. With the 200th anniversary of the formation of the modern Hellenic state falling on 25 March 2021, and the 2,500th anniversary of the Battles of Thermopylae and Salamis occurring this year, what better way for your government to honour these important anniversaries.

The Parthenon, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is a universal symbol of Athenian democracy and Western Civilisation. With your knowledge and love of Greece and Greek history, we are sure you appreciate that the Greek people have a right to seek as part of their cultural heritage and identity, and do seek with great fervor, to have these sculptures re-united in Athens, where they were sculpted, erected, and viewed for 2,300 of the last 2,500 years.

The United Kingdom is rightly proud of your built heritage. From Stonehenge to Tower Bridge, many of the UK's greatest cultural landmarks are global icons. And those icons deserve to be enjoyed by British citizens and visitors to the UK in their original location. It just would not be acceptable to the UK to have your cultural history dismantled. If half of Stonehenge had been dismantled, for example, and relocated in a foreign museum, we are confident you would be leading the campaign to have it returned home.

Central to your recent General Election and referendum campaign successes has been the importance you place on the role of Members of the United Kingdom Parliament. The return of the Parthenon Sculptures is a matter that can only be addressed by the UK Parliament. Often the responsibility is passed to the trustees of the British Museum, but even if the trustees wanted to consider a request to return the Parthenon Sculptures, the law does not allow them to do so.

A parliamentary debate and vote on amending the 1963 British Museum Act would be an opportunity for parliament to show that they trust the trustees to run the museum how they see fit for the 21st century. Whilst we note that a UK Parliamentary Petition is circulating asking MPs to consider the issue, we urge you to grant government time to allow elected representatives to debate and vote on amending the British Museum Act 1963. This debate would allow the House of Commons to carefully consider the issue of the Parthenon Sculptures as well as consider what responsibilities they wish to hand the trustees of the British Museum.

In taking the initiative of vesting the trustees of the museum with the right to return the Parthenon Sculptures if they see fit, you would affirm your admiration and respect for the immense legacy of ancient Greece, promote the indivisibility of classical art, and, in fact, enhance the reputation and esteem of the British Museum and your nation. We are also sure that the trustees of the British Museum will welcome additional responsibilities and legal clarification to run the museum as they wish. I am sure you agree that the trustees are better placed to run a museum than either government or parliament.

The Hellenic Republic has affirmed its sincere intent to creatively collaborate and cooperate with the British Museum to avert creating a void in the Museum's collection following the return of the sculptures. Few nations possess the means to follow through on such a promise. Greece can and the British people and British Museum would benefit from it.

In our view, the voluntary return of the Parthenon sculptures would set no legal precedent, or otherwise affect the ownership or disposition of other objects in museums. The appropriate language and agreements regarding the repatriation can and should create a "win-win" situation. The commitment to return the Parthenon Sculptures to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the formation of modern Greece would send a signal to the world that your leadership, your government and your country is both respectful of history and confident for the future. It would strengthen the historic bonds between the United Kingdom and the Hellenic Republic, and further strengthen the ties that bind our European family of nations.

Yours sincerely,

The undersigned Members of the European Parliament:

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