



Plenary sitting

B9-0178/2024

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))

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on behalf of the Renew Group

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

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Russia,
 - having regard to Articles 36 and 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
 - having regard to Directive 2014/60/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on the return of cultural objects unlawfully removed from the territory of a Member State and amending Regulation (EU) No 1024/2012¹ and 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 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe’s Opinion 193 (1996) entitled ‘Russia’s request for membership of the Council of Europe’ and to its Resolution 1896 (2012) entitled ‘The honouring of obligations and commitments by the Russian Federation’,
 - having regard to the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (CETS 199) of 27 October 2005 and the Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property (CETS 221) of 19 May 2017,
 - having regard to the Russian-Romanian Treaty on Friendly Relations and Cooperation of 4 July 2003 and the accompanying joint statement by the Romanian and Russian Ministers of Foreign Affairs, which established the Romanian-Russian Joint Commission for the study of issues arising from the history of bilateral relations, including the issue of the Romanian treasure,
 - having regard to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict,
 - having regard to the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property,
 - having regard to the general principles of international law recognised by states, such as the principle of good faith and the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes,
 - having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas during the First World War, as the Central Powers had occupied a significant part of Romania and threatened to occupy the rest, the Romanian Government at the time, under pressure from its ally, Tsarist Russia, agreed to transfer Romania’s national

¹ OJ L 159, 28.5.2014, p. 1.

treasure to Russia, with the aim of keeping it safe from the armies of the Central Powers;

- B. whereas this treasure included the treasure of the National Bank of Romania, which included 91.48 tonnes of fine gold, royal collections of jewels and rare coins, jewellery, heritage paintings and art collections, religious artefacts and archives, rare historical manuscripts, collections and valuables belonging to several public institutions, private banks, commercial companies and individuals, spanning over five centuries of Romanian history; whereas the rare gold coins which represent a large proportion of the treasure of the National Bank of Romania deposited in Moscow possess a numismatic and cultural value distinct from the value of the gold itself;
- C. whereas the Romanian and Russian Governments signed official protocols for the transfer of this treasure to Moscow, with a detailed inventory documenting the gold reserves of the National Bank of Romania, with the Russian Government's guarantee regarding the safety of transport, the safety of deposit and safety of return to Romania, as witnessed by other states at the time; whereas the transfer of the treasure took place through two train transports in December 1916 and July 1917; whereas in Moscow, the treasure was stored at the Kremlin and inventoried by the Russian side, and was found to be in complete accordance with the statements of the National Bank of Romania;
- D. whereas after the October Revolution in Russia and the seizure of power by the Communists under Lenin's leadership, the newly established Soviet regime broke off diplomatic relations with Romania, seized the Romanian treasure and refused to return it;
- E. whereas a state's gold reserves serve as a crucial financial asset, providing stability to its currency, bolstering confidence in the nation's economic strength; whereas the Soviet Union's refusal to return this treasure weakened the Romanian State as it emerged from the First World War and has remained a major point of contention in relations between the two countries;
- F. whereas on two occasions, in 1935 and 1956, the Soviet Union agreed to return a portion of the archives and items of historical and cultural value to Romania; whereas, however, the bulk of the Romanian treasure, including the gold component of the reserve of the Romanian National Bank, were not returned; whereas these two restitutions are clear indications that the Soviet/Russian side acknowledged that it has a duty to return the Romanian treasure;
- G. whereas the Russian Federation is the legal successor to the Soviet Union, which continued the legal personality of Tsarist Russia, and is thus under an obligation to return these assets belonging to Romania;
- H. whereas in 2012 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted Resolution 1896 (2012) entitled 'The honouring of obligations and commitments by the Russian Federation', asking the Russian Federation to continue efforts to rapidly settle outstanding issues on the return of cultural and other property by direct negotiation with the countries concerned;
- I. whereas, following the joint statement of the Romanian and Russian foreign ministers

of 4 July 2003, the two sides established a Romanian-Russian Joint Commission for the study of issues arising from the history of bilateral relations, including the issue of the Romanian treasure deposited in Moscow during the First World War; whereas during a period of 15 years, the Commission met only five times, with the last meeting occurring in 2019; whereas in the protocols concluded at the end of these meetings, the Russian side acknowledged Romania's claim against the Russian Federation and agreed that the documents presented by the Romanian side represent authentic documents, with the status of an international treaty, attesting to Romania's deposit of its treasure, including its National Bank's treasure, in Russia;

- J. whereas Directives 93/7/EEC² and 2014/60/EU represent key pieces of legislation on the return of cultural objects unlawfully removed from the territory of a Member State; whereas the EU Action Plan against Trafficking in Cultural Goods confirmed the EU's broader commitment to protecting cultural heritage; whereas EU legislation addresses the return of unlawfully removed cultural objects, whether they have been relocated within the Union or removed from the territory of a Member State unlawfully through breach of the legislation in force or breach of the conditions under which temporary authorisation was granted;
 - K. whereas the illegal appropriation of Romania's national treasure by Russia remains a unique international case, in which a state's gold reserve and heritage objects were entrusted to another state with legally valid documents and guarantees of return, only for the receiving state to disregard these signed obligations, thereby violating international law and customs;
 - L. whereas the restitution of the appropriated Romanian national treasure is of great importance for both the national and institutional memory of the country; whereas Romania has consistently sought the restitution of all its treasure deposited in Moscow for over a hundred years and will continue to keep its claim on the agenda until the treasure's full restitution;
- 1. Deplores Russia's failure to fully return the Romanian national treasure to Romania, as explicitly outlined in the official bilateral agreements between the two states and as expected under international law and norms;
 - 2. Expresses its dismay that despite multiple negotiation efforts in the aftermath of the First World War and, more recently, the work of the Romanian-Russian Joint Commission of experts, Russia has shown an overt reluctance to return Romania's national treasure;
 - 3. Calls on the Government of the Russian Federation to take the necessary steps to fully return to Romania the remainder of Romania's national treasure sent to Moscow for safekeeping in 1916 and 1917;
 - 4. Calls for the EU and its Member States to support in solidarity Romania's efforts to reclaim its national treasure, a matter of enduring concern to Romanian society; calls for the EU and its Member States to cooperate with the Romanian State and the National

² Council Directive 93/7/EEC of 15 March 1993 on the return of cultural objects unlawfully removed from the territory of a member State (OJ L 74, 27.3.1993, p. 74).

Bank of Romania in order to raise awareness of this matter and coordinate their actions with the goal of returning Romania's national treasure to its rightful place;

5. Calls for the EU and its Member States to include the return of the Romanian national treasure on the diplomatic agenda governing their relations with Russia; stresses that Romania is not the only EU Member State whose national treasures and cultural heritage have been looted and stolen by Russia, and therefore calls for a thorough analysis, in particular of the treasures of countries which suffered Soviet and Tsarist Russian occupation and repression, and for joint action at EU level to recover them;
6. Calls for the EU and its Member States to develop a more significant and comprehensive reassessment of EU-Russia relations, given Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine and hybrid warfare against the EU and its Member States; considers that this reassessment should also address other instances in which Russia has acted in complete disregard of international norms to the detriment of EU Member States; insists that the return of stolen national treasures and cultural and historical heritage of EU Member States must be one of the conditions in the future EU relations with Russia;
7. Welcomes the EU's substantial efforts to protect national, cultural and historical heritage by implementing legislation and cooperation mechanisms governing the return of cultural and heritage assets unlawfully taken from EU countries' territories and its efforts to combat the traffic in cultural objects;
8. Calls for the EU and its Member States to consider broadening the scope of EU policies governing the protection of cultural goods in order to encompass the recovery of national treasures relocated under bilateral agreements between states, as well as to strengthen EU support to Member States in conducting their actions; highlights that the exceptional nature of the Romanian national treasure's illegal appropriation underscores unique specificities that demand a tailor-made European response to facilitate its return, thus expanding the scope of EU's approach towards the restitution of assets unlawfully removed from EU countries' territories;
9. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and to the Russian Government.