



---

## TEXTS ADOPTED

---

### **P9\_TA(2024)0171**

### **Return of Romanian national treasure illegally appropriated by Russia**

**European Parliament resolution of 14 March 2024 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 the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), particularly to Articles 6, 36 and 167 thereof,
- having regard to the Treaty on European Union (TEU), particularly to the preamble thereto and to Article 3(3) thereof,
- having regard to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict,
- having regard to Opinion 193 (1996) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of 25 January 1996 entitled ‘Russia’s request for membership of the Council of Europe’ and to Resolution 1896 (2012) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of 2 October 2012 entitled ‘The honouring of obligations and commitments by the Russian Federation’,
- 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 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, adopted by the UNESCO General Conference at its 16th session on 14 November 1970,

- having regard to the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 16 November 1972,
  - 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 1024/2012<sup>1</sup>,
  - 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 Council of Europe Framework Convention of 27 October 2005 on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (CETS No 199),
  - having regard to the Council of Europe Convention of 19 May 2017 on Offences relating to Cultural Property (CETS No 221),
  - having regard to the general principles of international law recognised by states, such as the principle of sovereignty and non-interference, the principle of good faith and the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes,
  - having regard to Rule 132(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas a state's gold reserves serve as a crucial financial asset, providing stability to its currency and bolstering confidence in the nation's economic strength;
  - B. whereas a state's gold reserves play a unique and long-term role in finance and economics, representing a key component of the currency reserves that nations hold; whereas during financial crises, central bank gold reserves function as a safe-haven asset in periods of market turmoil;
  - C. whereas the preamble to the TEU states that the signatories draw 'inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe' and desire to 'deepen the solidarity between their peoples while respecting their history, their culture and their traditions', and Article 6 TFEU lists culture as a policy area under the 'categories and areas of Union competence', with different actions that can be undertaken by the EU to 'support, coordinate or complement the action of Member States'; whereas under Article 36 TFEU, Member States have the prerogative to define their national treasures within their jurisdiction and to implement the requisite measures for their safeguarding;

---

<sup>1</sup> OJ L 159, 28.5.2014, p. 1.

- D. whereas the term 'Romanian national treasure' comprises 91,5 tonnes of fine gold belonging to the gold reserves of the National Bank of Romania, royal collections of jewels and rare coins with a numismatic and cultural value that is distinct from the value of the gold itself, as well as cultural, religious and archival goods belonging to the country's national heritage;
- E. whereas there are legislative grounds for the return of cultural goods and national treasures that have been removed from the territory of an EU country unlawfully through a breach of the legislation in force or a breach of the conditions under which temporary authorisation was granted for their removal; whereas Romania has a fully legally valid claim to its national treasure that was evacuated to Russia in 1916 and 1917;
- F. whereas the treasure was stored in Russia under the assurance that it would be restituted in full, in accordance with the documents that were signed, which have the value of international treaties;
- G. whereas the illicit appropriation of Romania's national treasure by Russia represents a breach of international law and customs, as the transfer of gold reserves along with the substantial collection of cultural, religious and archival objects for safekeeping during exceptional circumstances was covered by a properly documented and legally valid official agreement with legal guarantees of return, the stipulated obligations of which were ignored;
- H. 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 were authentic and had the status of an international treaty attesting to Romania's deposit of its treasure, including its National Bank's treasure, in Russia;
- I. 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;
- J. whereas the restitution of the appropriated Romanian national treasure is of great importance for both the institutional and national memory of the country; whereas the restitution of cultural heritage

unlawfully seized from its country of origin is crucial for the protection of the universal value of cultural heritage;

- K. whereas bringing about the return of the Romanian national treasure requires a tailor-made European response;
1. Deplores Russia's failure to fully return the Romanian national treasure to Romania, in accordance with the obligation explicitly outlined in the official bilateral agreements between the two states and as expected under international law and norms;
  2. Urges the Russian Federation to fully return to Romania the remainder of Romania's national treasure that was sent to Russia for safekeeping in 1916 and 1917;
  3. Recalls that the illicit appropriation of Romania's national treasure by Russia is a unique international case in which a state's monetary gold reserves, together with cultural, religious and archival objects that are part of that state's national heritage, were entrusted for safekeeping to another state, under an agreement set out in legally valid documents giving legal guarantees of return, but the obligations were ultimately disregarded, in breach of international law and customs;
  4. Recognises that the national treasure deposited for safekeeping in Russia in 1916 and 1917 during the difficult times of the First World War, with the Government of Imperial Russia's guarantee regarding the safety of transport, the safety of deposit and the safety of return to Romania, is an unparalleled international case of illegal appropriation of gold reserves and heritage objects and a matter of perpetual concern to Romanian society;
  5. Notes that the First World War forced the Romanian Government of the time to entrust Romania's national treasure to an allied state for protection against destruction; recalls that, during the wartime hardships, dozens of train carriages transported the majority of Romania's national treasure to Tsarist Russia for safekeeping until times of peace, with a detailed inventory documenting the gold reserves of the National Bank of Romania, under Russia's guarantee of protection and return, as witnessed by other states at the time; underlines that the national treasure legally given into Russian custody comprised 91,5 tonnes of fine gold belonging to the reserves of the National Bank of Romania, royal collections of jewels and rare coins, together with priceless cultural and historical assets, such as state archives, documents, precious historical manuscripts, heritage paintings, rare books and collections from many public and private institutions, spanning over five centuries of Romanian history;
  6. Emphasises that despite several attempts at diplomatic negotiations in the aftermath of the First World War, the Romanian national

treasure has never been fully returned by Russia, as had been legally stipulated in the official bilateral agreement between the two states;

7. Notes that some of the cultural, religious and archival goods belonging to the national treasure illegally appropriated by Russia were returned to Romania in 1935 and 1956; highlights that, to date, however, none of the outstanding 91,5 tonnes of fine gold, which are part of the reserves of the National Bank of Romania, have been returned, despite the protocols signed upon the transfer of the treasure to Russia;
8. Expresses its concern that, despite the creation of the Romanian-Russian Joint Commission of experts mandated to enable discussions regarding this issue, efforts to bring about the return of the Romanian national treasure, including the illegally appropriated gold reserves of the National Bank of Romania, through bilateral diplomatic channels between Romania and Russia have met with Russia's refusal to return what previous regimes have unlawfully kept in disregard of the restitution protocols that were signed;
9. Highlights that special attention must be paid to the preservation of Member States' national treasures, as stipulated in the EU Treaties;
10. 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 goods;
11. Acknowledges that Directive 2014/60/EU is the key pillar of the EU's commitment to safeguarding national treasures and cultural objects, while the EU Action Plan against Trafficking in Cultural Goods has confirmed the EU's broader commitment to protecting cultural heritage; emphasises that unlawfully removed cultural objects must be returned, regardless of whether they have been relocated within the Union or exported to a non-EU state; notes that, while under the relevant provisions of the TFEU, current EU legislation covers the return of cultural goods and national treasures unlawfully removed before 1 January 1993 by one Member State to another, the repatriation of the Romanian national treasure remains a special case requiring a specific solution; 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 the EU's approach towards the restitution of cultural assets unlawfully removed from EU countries' territories;
12. Emphasises that bringing about the return of an EU Member State's cultural assets and national treasures that are unlawfully

appropriated by a non-EU state requires substantial diplomatic dialogue, both bilaterally and within international forums;

13. Calls on the Commission to expand the scope of the EU policies governing the protection of cultural goods to include the recovery of national treasures relocated during wartime under bilateral agreements between states;
14. Calls on the Commission and the European External Action Service to include the return of the Romanian national treasure on the diplomatic bilateral agenda governing EU-Russia relations once the regional context permits the resumption of political dialogue between the parties;
15. Calls on the Commission to create concrete synergies with the Romanian State, the National Bank of Romania and other relevant institutions in order to mobilise coordinated efforts and to pursue all diplomatic means of mediating, promoting communication – where appropriate – with Russian counterparts and seeking solutions to ensure that the missing national treasure is returned to where it belongs without delay;
16. Calls on the Commission to explore the possibility of acting as a partner to the Romanian representatives involved in the Romanian-Russian Joint Commission mandated to discuss the return of the Romanian national treasure;
17. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the European External Action Service, 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 the state institutions of the Russian Federation.