

Parthenon Sculptures: The international impact of Ta Nea's weekend story

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Around the world, international media made the most of the exclusive news in "Ta Nea Weekend", the revelation of talks between Greece and George Osborne, covering a 13 month period. Talks held with Greece's PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis, Greece's Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias and Giorgos Gerapetritis.

According to Greek and British sources, the Prime Minister and his two ministers are in "advanced" negotiations with the Chair of the British Museum in order to reunite the Parthenon Marbles.

The London museum confirmed the report, admitting that it "speaks with everyone, including the Greek government". As the representative of the museum told "Ta Nea", "we seek to establish new, positive, long-term partnerships with countries such as Greece".

A Greek source said the deal has not yet been finalised and, although "significant progress" has been made, it cannot be ruled out that the negotiations could lead to a stalemate.

Lively debate

Eminent Britons welcomed the talks, expressing the hope that the Parthenon Marbles would be returned to Greece, while on social networks a lively debate broke out with thousands of comments from Britons in favour of the repatriation of Pheidias' masterpieces.

The news reached great proportions in the media, which once again demonstrates the support from British public opinion to this issue.

The Ta Nea story was published on Saturday across all news bulletins in the UK, print, radio and TV. In fact, it became a third topic on the BBC News' afternoon bulletin. BBC Radio 4, Radio 5 and World Service devoted part of their broadcasts to the announcement, with British and Greek guests (such as Harry Theocharis and Yannis Varoufakis) commenting on the developments.

"It is very interesting to learn that we may be close to an agreement on the return of the Marbles," said BBC cultural editor-in-chief Katie Razal.

Prospects for resolution

The Sunday Times noted that the talks "create prospects for resolving one of the most bitter and long-standing cultural conflicts in more than 200 years." Times editor Liam Kelly stressed that "the meetings between Osborne and the Greek government are the clearest indication to date that a deal may be close."

The Observer hosted the news on its front page. On the fifth page, in a full-page response from Athens, Helena Smith said that "the negotiations may mark a seismic development on the path to resolving the longest-running cultural conflict in the world."

The British newspaper cites sources who referred to the Ta Nea's revelation "not only credible but also very exciting." Gerapetritis also spoke to Observer, and confirmed the report, admitting that he too had met with Osborne.

In an attempt to downplay the issue, he spoke of "preliminary talks", but officials with knowledge of the discussions stressed that "after a barrage of negotiations between the Prime Minister and ministers that began in November 2021, it is obvious that we are now at an advanced stage, but the outcome is not certain".

Sunday Telegraph also spoke of "advanced talks", while Daily Mail noted that "after the news on the secret negotiations, the ancient sculptures may eventually leave the British Museum and be returned to Greece".

The news was included by many other British media outlets (Evening Standard, Independent, LBC, Times Radio, and more), the Associated Press, Bloomberg, the French newspapers Le Monde and Le Figaro, France 24, Politico, Euronews, the Washington Post, the American network ABC News and media outlets in Spain, Italy, Ireland, Australia, Turkey and China.

Historical crime

"It's good that the two sides are finally talking. I hope that an agreement will be found, as was the case with the return of the Fagan fragment from Sicily. In this way, the British Museum can correct a 200 year old historical crime," commented Dr Christiane Tytgat, president of the International Association for the Reunification of the Parthenon Sculptures (IARPS).

"The news of the talks is very gratifying for us who have been campaigning for the return of the Parthenon Marbles for almost 40 years. We call on the British Museum to become part of genuine, sincere cultural diplomacy and to return these sculptures to where they belong," said British Committee for the Reunification of Sculptures (BCRPM) vice-chairman Paul Cartledge.

The internationally renowned British lawyer Mark Stephens, Senior Member of Howard Kennedy LLP also added: "this is excellent news and a very important development".