

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Working Documents

1981 - 1982

1 October 1981

DOCUMENT 1-557/81

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION
tabled by Mr BEYER DE RYKE

for entry in the register
pursuant to Rule 49 of the Rules of Procedure

on the need for European action to protect the
site and buildings of the Acropolis of Athens

The European Parliament,

- considering the continuing deterioration of the buildings and site of the Acropolis of Athens,
 - having regard to the major conservation and protection effort hitherto undertaken by the Greek state,
 - considering the appeal launched by UNESCO for aid in conserving the Acropolis,
 - considering, moreover, the historical importance for the cultural inheritance of humanity and the political importance for the idea of democracy that these historic buildings represent in the eyes of the citizens of the EEC,
 - having regard to the report by the Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport (PE 73.257),
1. Congratulates the Greek government on the major efforts undertaken to conserve and protect the buildings and site of the Acropolis of Athens;
 2. Hopes that the UNESCO appeal for protective action will be more widely disseminated to all member countries of the UNO and among all those concerned with such action;
 3. Asks for specific action to be taken by the governments of the EEC Member States through their appropriate departments in the fields of scientific research, culture and education;
 4. Asks the Commission, with the cooperation of the Member States, to provide, as a research project priority, appropriations for a study of the deterioration of the Acropolis marble;
 5. Asks the Commission, with the cooperation of the Member States, to initiate an information campaign on the site and buildings of the Acropolis and the need to protect them aimed at educational establishments and young people;
 6. Calls on the citizens of the European Community to take note of the effort to conserve the Acropolis of Athens as the cradle of democracy and European civilization and the common heritage of Europe's peoples and societies;
 7. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission of the European Communities, the Council and the Governments of the Member States.

Justification

The Acropolis of Athens is sick. No cure for its sickness has as yet been found. It is falling victim to the modern scourge of pollution and has no resistance to the strains of twentieth century living.

These are the opening words of a series of articles published in the Belgian press. After reading these articles I attended a Congress in Athens at the end of June. I saw the state to which this unique monument to our civilization has been reduced.

The deterioration of the Acropolis is an emotive subject; for it means that the symbol of our cultural heritage, the embodiment of Europe's entire history, is succumbing to the onslaught of technical progress.

The deterioration of the surface of the marble of the last remnants of Athenian democracy is heralded by the formation of a sugar-like layer on the stone that no modern technique is capable of combating at present levels of research.

Chemical phenomena are responsible for the deterioration of the site: motor vehicle and heating exhaust gases, pollution of the air by sulphuric acid. As a general rule, when the marble is attacked by the sulphurous concoction that passes for air, it assumes the consistency of plaster. The parts most exposed to the elements are deteriorating even more rapidly, in particular the Erechtheion.

Another cause of deterioration is the dust that pervades the atmosphere in the Greek capital; as it accumulates on the marble a soap-like substance is formed that causes swellings and cracks in the stone.

In view of the scale of the disaster, the Greek authorities have of course taken countermeasures. According to sources which I have been able to verify, Mr Dondas, Director of the Acropolis and Ephor-General of Antiquities, has organized a gigantic effort to protect the site and its buildings.

All the sculptures, including the Caryatides and the friezes from the West pediment of the Pantheon have been taken to a place of safety. All the iron brackets, used to secure the buildings and dating from the nineteenth century have been replaced by titanium brackets.

This work on the Erechtheion alone will entail erecting and dismantling concrete blocks until 1984. As to the stone itself, the deterioration of the marble appears to be irreversible; even the techniques developed in France and the USA are less than ideal, since they cannot halt the process of deterioration.

Such approaches as protecting the stone by applying a layer of transparent plastic have been rejected for budgetary and scientific reasons.

As you know, Athens was hit last February by an earthquake. The Pantheon was seriously shaken, and some of the temple pediments and architraves were moved.

The spectacle of the Pantheon and the Erechtheion surrounded by scaffolding, the sight of a crane that will start dismantling operations in the autumn, are both poignant and ridiculous at the same time.

I am told that there are 40 workmen on the site, supervised by 12 experts and technicians. The Director of the Acropolis stresses that the workmen have the same delicate touch as the masons of antiquity and are true artisans.

Needless to say, this work costs a lot of money. Mr Andreanopoulos, the Greek Minister for Culture, reassured us on the fate of the Acropolis. In 1979 a special committee to study the problems of the Acropolis was set up, and he also supervises a committee for the preservation of the buildings.

This scientific committee comprising archeologists and chemists is studying the problems of the work that needs to be done to conserve ancient buildings. The equivalent of Bfrs 113 million has been allocated to conservation work over a ten-year period.

President Karamanlis has authorized special aid equivalent to Bfrs 430 million to cover the complete programme of work to be carried out.

UNESCO has launched an appeal. The response, however, has been poor. UNESCO aid has hitherto been confined, for lack of funds, to financing specialized material and equipment and to setting up a laboratory to study the properties of marble and its conservation.

I understand that Greece has decided to join forces with countries such as Italy in seeking solutions to the problems of stone deterioration.

Anti-pollution measures (no more coaches or cars allowed in the vicinity, a ban on certain kinds of heating oil) have been taken.

Finally, it must be remembered that more than two million tourists visit the site every year.

Greece has been a member of the European Community and its institutions since 1 January 1981. I believe, as a member of the committee of the European Parliament responsible for cultural affairs, that it is doubly important for Parliament to act on the need to conserve the Acropolis.

Firstly, because it goes without saying that the European Parliament is a remote descendent of the Parliament of Athens, and the birthplace of democracy certainly merits the attention of the elected Members of the European Assembly.

And then because the site has a symbolic value in itself. In spite of economic and social difficulties, institutions survive in the thinking of civilizations and individuals. The Parthenon is unquestionably a part, together with other sites in Egypt or South America or, nearer home, in Rome, of the heritage, or rather, of the record of the Human Adventure. And we are responsible before Humanity.

And lastly because our solidarity and interest in conserving the Acropolis will also amount, on the political level, to a display of solidarity and interest in safeguarding and maintaining Greek democracy within the European Community.

That is why I propose that our committee should adopt a motion for a resolution with the aim of arousing public opinion in Europe to the need to protect the site and buildings of the Acropolis of Athens.