

SEPTEMBER 5th 2006

**SPEECH OF THE MINISTER OF CULTURE MR. GEORGIOS
VOULGARAKIS AT THE PRESENTATION OF THE FIRST FRAGMENT
OF THE PARTHENON MARBLES THAT WAS RETURNED IN GREECE BY
THE UNIVERSITY OF HEIDELBERG**

“It is my great honor and I am deeply touched to present you today the first of the splitted fragments of the Parthenon Marbles that returns home, after almost one and half century.

As you already know, I traveled yesterday to Heidelberg to officially collect the fragment which was exhibited at the Archaeological Institute of the University of Heidelberg.

I decided to personally travel there, since I believe it is a great symbolic gesture by the University to return the fragment, putting an end to the ineffective dialogue concerning the restitution of the entire Sculptures from the foreign museums. The University of Heidelberg came to this conclusion – for returning the fragment-acknowledging the importance of the Parthenon **as a unique monument of the world cultural heritage.**

In essence, the University made the first step in the promotion of the restitution of the Parthenon Marbles, realizing that there cannot be any scientific, or legal or moral argument for their retaining.

In addition, the University indicated that the Museums, as well as the collections of the Foundations and Organisations should be neither “luxurious exiles” nor “ceteries” of ancient monuments.

Indeed, they are living Organizations going with the flow, safeguarding the cultural cooperation and collaboration between the nations and aid-giving the concept of a united Europe, which cannot go ahead but combining politics with justice and morality.

The Parthenon is a symbol of the spiritual deposit of the Athenians' 5th century B.C. to humanity. It is a distinctive monument, because it transforms the material to spiritual qualities.

It represents the revival of the personal awareness inside the corporate social frame of the Democracy principles. It represents the equality of classes, generations and sexes. The historicity, the importance of the remembrance as a requirement for the self-knowledge, the human measures and the values of morality. The debt of honour for protecting the State and the Laws, the consciousness of the superiority of democracy.

The incorruptible shape of the Parthenon is a fundamental condition for its understanding as a single work of art. Its content is comprehended through its united shape.

If the principle of incorruptibility is a fundamental, general rule for every creation, in the case of the Parthenon it acquires its full sense. Only if we gain the unity of the whole by restoring all the fragments, the Parthenon will be reinstated as a leading symbol of the European spirit, which summarizes the basic principles of humanity.

The request for the Parthenon Marbles restoration exceeds our national territories and it has nothing to do with chauvinism, as **it is universal**. I will always lay emphasis on the **uniqueness of the Parthenon, as a universal monument**, since this is the determinant of making our demand ecumenical.

This is exactly the way Greeks conceptualize it, but also those who think of it as a self-evident. Today, we are sending this moral to all foreign museums that possess sculptural elements of the Parthenon.

At this point, I would like to make clear that the marbles restitution will not set up a claim for other monuments or collections of antiquity. The case of Parthenon is absolutely distinctive. The reunion of the Marbles is our debt of honor towards history. The museums ought to meet their moral obligations towards the cultural and spiritual coherence of the United Europe.

I am hopeful and confident that the restoration of the fragment from Heidelberg will rekindle the conversation for the restitution of the fragmented members of the Parthenon Marbles. I believe in the prospect of a calm and objective dialogue.

I also believe in the acquiescence, the cooperation and the mutual help between all the European cultural organizations. I look forward to the power of the future and its positive prospect.

For every Parthenon fragment that is been restored, various “gifts in return” will be offered derived from our wealthy cultural history, as a proof of good will and cooperation.

The scientific work that is being held on the Sacred Rock and the forthcoming completion of the New Acropolis Museum predispose for the welcome of all the Sculptures in Greece.

All extant members of the Monument will be reunited in the Exhibition Hall of the Parthenon at the New Museum. Inside the hall, a new great and homogeneous collection will be developed, consisting of the Marbles we claim from the British Museum, which were thought as independent from the rest of the monument, since there were separated from their historical and cultural frame.

At the Exhibition Hall of the Parthenon, some specific window-cases will remain unoccupied waiting for the restitution of the fragmented Sculptures.”