

To the attention of
Mr. David Maria Sassoli
President of the European Parliament

CC:

Ms. Ursula von der Leyen President of the European Commission
Mr. Dimitrios Papadimoulis Vice-President of the European Parliament
Mr. Werner Hoyer President of the European Investment Bank

Athens, 15 July 2021
Ref. no: 306/E.E.

Re: Urgent, Safeguard of Antiquities at Venizelos Metro Station, Thessaloniki, following Mr. Dimitrios Papadimoulis, Vice-President of the European Parliament, letter addressed to you on the 13th of July 2021

Attached:

1. A petition of 200 scholars and experts from all over the world sent to the Greek P.M
2. A petition in avaaz with 60.000 signatures
3. Press clippings from Le Figaro, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Spiegel.

Dear Mr. President,

We, on behalf of the Board of Directors of ELLINIKI ETAIRIA (www.ellet.gr), the oldest Greek organization working on the protection of the environment and the cultural heritage since 1972, would like to support Mr. Papadimoulis' "outmost concern and strong reservations regarding the Greek government plans to dismantle significant archaeological findings of particular historic importance, excavated in the Metro station "Venizelos" in Thessaloniki, which is currently under construction". ELLET, together with international scholars, as also with leading heritage organisations in Greece and Europe, is fighting for the preservation in situ of these unique European cultural heritage since 2013 something that was achieved between 2017 and 2019, but which has been put once again at risk since the ministerial decision of March 2020. Ellet has used any available legal path and we will continue to do so. But last week the political decision of the violent extraction of the findings was made, and it is a matter of days before Greece and Europe as a whole loses the historic chance to preserve in situ an urban monument of unique significance.



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These outstanding antiquities, unparalleled elsewhere in the area of the former Roman Empire, date from the 4th to the 9th century, amounting to a total of 1500 square metres, is a significant part of the Late Roman city's urban landscape. For three short periods in the 4th century, Thessaloniki served as one of the capitals of the Roman Empire, at a key moment in the development of European history. Later became the second metropolis of the Eastern Roman/Byzantine Empire. Cultural Heritage remains of this period of the city's history are therefore of huge importance for Europe as a whole.

In accordance with Greek and EU legislation, studies were prepared and adopted in 2017 for the construction of this Metro Station focusing on the preservation of the antiquities in situ, in accordance with the (revised) 1992 Valletta Convention, the European Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage of Europe adopted under the auspices of the Council of Europe.

In late 2019 a newly appointed Board of "Attiko Metro", the company responsible for the Thessaloniki Metro's construction, decided to alter the method of building the Venizelos Station, which regrettably foresees dismantling, removing and, after the station's completion, replacing the antiquities. This altered plan threatens the integrity of the antiquities; it raises doubts as to their return; and, crucially, it devalues their significance as a testimony of unbroken urban life, thus eliminating any possibility of including them on the UNESCO World Heritage List, something that would be of great economic benefit for Greece in general and Thessaloniki in particular.

For this reason Elliniki Etairia, with the endorsement of Europa Nostra, appealed to the Hellenic Council of State. More recently, 200 scholars and experts from all over the world (please see attached letter and list of signatures) have implored the Greek Prime Minister to intervene and prevent this development. Furthermore, technical experts confirm it is possible to operate the Metro line with the remaining twelve stations while Venizelos Station is being completed in accordance with the 2017 in situ project, and put into operation later. We do understand and support the necessity of the fastest possible operation of the Metro. By contrast, the "Attiko Metro's" current proposal for removal and replacement of the antiquities will require extensive excavations of lower layers involving uncertain duration and costs.

The metro works have benefited from EU funding, in the form of EU grants allocated for this project over two EU programmatic periods (2007-2020), as well as in the form of a loan from the European Investment Bank. And we are confident you agree with us that European Union funding should not be used, whether directly or indirectly, to degrade our shared cultural heritage.

Following the recent narrow decision by the Greek Council of State (13 votes in favour and 12 votes against) that the dismantling, removal and relocation would not be illegal under Greek law, last week



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the Minister of Culture and the Minister of Infrastructure in joined statement indicated they will remove the antiquities from the site and the works will start within the next days.

We are convinced that the immediate intervention by the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Investment Bank with the Greek Prime Minister are the only means of preventing the most serious damage of the common cultural heritage of all Europeans.

Yours sincerely,

Lydia Carras
President
ELLINIKI ETAIRIA

Costas Stamatopoulos
Vice-President
ELLINIKI ETAIRIA