

Speech delivered by the Minister of Culture, Lina Mendoni

Your Excellency, President of the Hellenic Republic, with a feeling of joy and pride, we truly welcome all tonight at the Acropolis Museum, where a few days ago we celebrated this museum's 15th successful anniversary.

The Acropolis Museum, as an architectural building, of international prestige and scope, as a Cultural Organization, is included among the leading and most popular museum of its kind – worldwide - fully winning the expert recognition and admiration hundreds of thousands of visitors annually.

The Museum was designed, built and equipped with modern specifications, in order to welcome and shelter the best possible conditions for the unique findings of its historical excavations from the Acropolis. Among them, of course, the architectural sculptures of the monuments edifices of the Rock and above all, all of Sculptures of the Parthenon, both those that are in Greece, as well as those that remain, for now, in the British Museum.

Universally I would say, and internationally, it is accepted, that Greece's request for the reunification of the Sculptures is tangible evidence of strong willed and practical in its ability to protect, to preserve, to highlight these sculptures and manage them in both a scientific and technically way.

For decades, we have been implementing an exemplary maintenance, and restoration of all its monuments of the Acropolis, including the Parthenon. With the establishment, construction, and above all the operation of the Acropolis Museum, the argument of the British, that Greece it did not have adequate and worthy infrastructures to house the sculptures has been eradicated.

For 15 years now, it is abundantly clear that this argument is not only not valid, but on the contrary, after the revelations of the latter years, has now been completely reversed. In addition to the adequacy of the infrastructure and operation of the Acropolis Museum, its organic connection with the Rock and the monuments is also highlighted.

Not least its symbiotic relationship with the modern and the ancient, the supertext and the underlying built environment and the urban landscape with its historical present and past.

Athens is ready to welcome and to exhibit all of the Parthenon Sculptures as a single and indivisible unity.

This museum combines the best natural and conceptual framework, for highlighting, the interpretation and understanding of masterpieces of Pheidias.

In the spirit of 15th anniversary of its operation, the Museum, and the event taking place today for the official rendering in Greek and the international audience of a new and particularly important one of museum space, which complements that of Museum. It is the "Museum under the Museum", which offers visitors the important improved comprehension and interpretation of material remains and the history of one entire neighborhood of ancient Athens, which was discovered during systematic excavations, carried out in the area for the construction of the Museum and the "Acropolis" station of the Athens Metro.

The site of excavation, came with a proposal by Bernard Tschumi and Michalis Fotiadis, was treated as an exhibition extension of the Museum, both in its physical and its conceptual continuation as it connects the new building with space and time.

Five years ago, the excavation became accessible to visitors, who acquired the possibility, beyond the tour of the rooms of the Museum, to browse the antiquities below. At this point I have a moral duty to remember personally and to publicly with honour the struggle of Dimitris Pandermalis.

The excellent arrangement of the excavation findings, against each shape and color of populism, which did not hesitate to instrumentalize his efforts. The foundation and the exemplary operation of this Museum, today's exhibition of mobile finds in this area of excavation, the whole project as a whole, is the answer to all of the supposedly lovers of monuments.

In the 5.5 acres of excavated space, 5.4 m<sup>2</sup> were demolished to build the building's foundation of the Museum. Dimitris Pandermalis and I - as Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and President of the KAS - 109 times crossed the threshold of the investigator.

Your Excellency Mr. President, the neighborhood, below the Museum, built in end of the slopes of its southern slope rock of the Acropolis, hosted almost uninterrupted life and activities of city residents from the

the millennium BC, to the 12<sup>th</sup>. The roads, houses, baths, workshops, shops, cemeteries coexisted or succeeded each other in passage of time in the wider area. For this region, Thucydides in the second book of referring to the history of Athens, says that it is one of the oldest in the city and with some of the oldest, holy septs. Until it was deserted and was abandoned, in a period that as a whole Athens was declining and shrinking.

Here, in this space, a composite was created and extremely interesting, historically and archaeological, palimpsest of uses and buildings, representative of the life of a poor popular strata, but also of social and intellectual elite in successive periods.

Today, the permanent exhibition of most of 1100 mobile findings of the excavations, the "Museum under the Museum", comes to complete the image of the ancient neighborhood. Located on its southern outskirts of the archaeological site, it is harmoniously integrated into the visitor journey contributing to better understanding of the daily lives of people, who lived here for more than 4,500 years.

In closing, I would like to thank and to congratulate the Director General and the staff of the Museum, for this permanent exhibition. Because the Museum is not only that shell and its exhibits. The people who founded it and created it, with our late friend, Dimitris Pandermalis. The report which, tonight, is inaugurated as a tribute to his memory. Finally, our warm thanks go to all at the Bank of Greece and to the Governor Giannis Stournara for the generous sponsorship. And it is because of this sponsorship that we are able to be here today. Thank you.

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