Box 12. International efforts to recover the NBR Treasure evacuated to Moscow in 1916-1917

Starting in 1991, the National Bank of Romania has consistently implemented a strategy to draw and maintain the public's attention to the issue of the NBR Treasure sent to Moscow during World War I and yet unrecovered. In 2023 and in the first part of 2024, several steps were taken to increase international awareness about this topic. Particular focus was placed on informing European public opinion and EU decision-makers regarding the 91.5 tonnes of fine gold confiscated by the Bolshevik regime more than a century ago and the fact that Romania holds a valid and enforceable claim on the Russian Federation, as the *de facto* heir of the USSR.

Specifically, in November 2023, the NBR organised the symposium entitled *The Treasure of the National Bank of Romania evacuated to Moscow – A claim older than a century*, during which two books written in English were launched: *The Romanian National Bank Treasure Taken to Moscow and Never Returned,* published by Cristian Păunescu, and *Romania's Treasure and its Destiny. Arguments from the Russian Archives*, authored by Ilie Schipor. These two books were distributed to the 705 MEPs, as well as to the 27 European Commissioners.

On 5 March 2024, at the European Parliament headquarters in Brussels, before the NBR's delegation and a large audience, the exhibition entitled "The gold Treasure of the National Bank of Romania sent to Moscow and never returned – A claim older than a century" was opened. Numerous MEPs, both Romanian and foreign, from all political groups, attended the event. The exhibition includes historical evidence, documents, legal evidence, and agreements signed by the Russian and Romanian parties with regard to the gold reserve sent to Moscow.

On the same day, the online edition of the *Politico* newspaper published the article entitled "The gold treasure of the National Bank of Romania that was sent to Moscow", with the subtitle "A claim older than a century – the odyssey of the central bank's 'evacuated' gold that was never returned after the First World War". This was also included in the print edition of 7 March 2024 of the same publication on European affairs.

Moreover, on 6 March 2024, the discussion on *Le trésor de la Banque Nationale de Roumanie envoyé à Moscou – une créance qui date depuis plus d'un siècle* took place at the Université libre de Bruxelles with support from the Romanian Cultural Institute.

This series of efforts contributed to the Resolution on the return of Romanian national treasure illegally appropriated by Russia being adopted by a large majority of votes in the plenary meeting of the European Parliament of 14 March 2024 in Strasbourg. The document was supported by all Romanian MEPs, who were joined by other 11 MEPs signing the draft resolution. In the address during the debate, Elisa Ferreira, the European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, reiterated that the EU was ready to endorse the efforts of the Romanian authorities, when the international context allowed it, if the Romanian party called for such aid.

The main message of the resolution is that the European Parliament requests the Russian Federation to fully return to Romania the treasure that was transported to Moscow in 1916-1914 and was not returned either in 1935, or in 1956. According to the final points of the resolution, the European Parliament:

- calls on the Commission and the European External Action Service to include the return of the Romanian national treasure on the diplomatic bilateral agenda governing EU-Russia relations once the regional context permits the resumption of political dialogue between the parties;
- calls on the Commission to create concrete synergies with the Romanian State, the National Bank of Romania and other relevant institutions in order to mobilise coordinated efforts and to pursue all diplomatic means of mediating, promoting communication – where appropriate – with Russian counterparts and seeking solutions to ensure that the missing national treasure is returned to where it belongs without delay;
- calls on the Commission to explore the possibility of acting as a partner to the Romanian representatives involved in the Romanian-Russian Joint Commission mandated to discuss the return of the Romanian national treasure;
- instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the European External Action Service, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the state institutions of the Russian Federation.

Thus, more than a century since the decision of the Genoa Conference in 1922, which requested the return of the Romanian treasure, the international public opinion was informed extensively on the valid and enforceable claim held by Romania on the Russian Federation, and the matter was introduced on the agenda of the EU institutions.