

Theft of Dacia masterpieces in the Netherlands becomes a political issue in Romania

The valuable metals, still missing despite the arrest of three suspects, feels like a blow to the national identity and increases the institutional battle that has led the country to the worst democratic crisis since the fall of communism in 1989.



The
hull of Cotofenesti.SERGIO GEIJO

[The theft of the golden helmet of Coțofenești and the three Dacian bracelets](#) in the early hours of Saturday morning from the Drents Museum in Assen, has raised blisters in Romania, the country that lent these works to the Netherlands and which are considered a Romanian treasure. It comes just as the country is going through its worst democratic crisis since the fall of communism in 1989, after the [Supreme Court annulled in early December the second round of the presidential elections](#) led by Calin Georgescu, an ultranationalist candidate with Russian sympathies. On Tuesday, in the midst of a wave of accusations, the loss of archaeological objects from the kingdom of Dacia - one of the great ancient civilizations of Europe, along with the Iberian, Celtic or Germanic ones - claimed the first victim: Ernest Oberlander-Târnoveanu, the director of the National Museum of Romanian History (MNIR) in charge of the security of the

priceless pieces. Yesterday, Wednesday, three suspects in the theft were arrested by the Dutch police, but the pieces are still missing.

The Minister of Culture, Natalia Intotero, announced in an unexpected way the dismissal of the supervisor of the Romanian historical treasure for the last fifteen years in a press conference in which she justified her decision by the lack of communication between the two institutions to clarify the agreement reached with the Dutch art gallery. "I felt that I was overcome by the management of a crisis situation," said Intotero, who acknowledged having asked him to submit the "resignation of honor": "He refused it; consequently, I went further in accordance with the legal provisions in force".

Oberlander-Târnoveanu, who is due to leave his post in two weeks, said in a telephone call that his dismissal was for political reasons. "The minister was seeking satisfaction in the face of the pressure she is receiving from higher up," explains the director, before stressing that "any event is politicized on an exorbitant scale when an unprincipled political battle is being fought," referring to the fierce struggle between the government coalition, made up of social democrats and liberals, and a [rising far-right](#) , which hopes to take over the presidency in May.

"There are people boarding a boat with a hole in it who fight to steer the rudder while the ship is sinking," maintains the specialist, with no political affiliation, who reiterates that he has not been indicated to be in breach of any applicable law or rule for sealing an agreement with the Dutch art gallery directly to promote the treasures coming from the Eastern European country from the 20th century B.C. to the 3rd century A.D. "I refused to submit my honorary resignation, considering that nothing could affect the process of recovering the four stolen heritage assets more seriously than leaving the MNIR without leadership during these crucial days," he says. "I refused to submit my honorable resignation, considering that nothing could more seriously affect the process of recovering the four stolen heritage assets than leaving the MNIR without leadership during these crucial days," asserts Oberlander-Târnoveanu, who avoids sharing his suspicions about the events: "I asked for information about the security system, possible incidents and the furniture of the exhibition, but I have only received information about how the theft took place."

The decision came after the Prime Minister, the social democrat [Marcel Ciolacu](#) , urged the highest representative of the sector to take drastic measures, such as sacking precious metals were transferred to the Netherlands for the exhibition entitled *Dacia*, his political rivals, especially from the ultra-right factions, claiming that he never signed a government decree to allow the objects to leave Romanian territory. Only three days later, he admitted that all responsibility lay with the Dutch authorities: "For us it is vital that the investigation leads to the capture of the thieves and the full recovery of the Dacian treasures; the Dutch state bears full responsibility for this situation".

Breaking: Dutch Police reveals picture of suspect of the theft of Romanias national treasure, from a museum in the Netherlands...

It's now a matter of hours... Or less 😊 pic.twitter.com/g5GY2u7PCg

- Arthur Brand (art detective) (@brand_arthur) [January 29, 2025](#)

However, analysts point out that the measure is politically motivated by the upcoming presidential elections which, according to the polls, give [Georgescu](#), a candidate promoted by the Chinese social network [TikTok](#) as the winner once again, which has shocked the country with its messianic and sovereigntist messages. Precisely, the ultra-nationalist, who called for the head of those responsible, called the incident "diplomatic". "This is not a simple theft! Behind this criminal act there is a message! Of the thousands of pieces exhibited in that museum, only these were stolen, so we can understand the message behind the gesture: we will prove your identity whenever we want, because you do not know how to defend your values! This was the real theft, the identity theft, again!", Georgescu spat.

The masterpieces were stolen by four thieves who burst open the doors of the Dutch cultural center with explosives and took only these objects in just a few minutes. In Romania, the Old Kingdom of Dacia is revered as one of the greatest national treasures, studied in school textbooks, so experts believe it will be impossible to find a buyer, so they predict that the only way to make money would be to melt down the gold it is made of. "Dacia was a civilization built on a solid Thracian foundation, but which absorbed with inventiveness and originality Greek and Scythian influences, later Celtic and Roman, before meeting an abrupt and violent end, just when it had reached its cultural peak, as a result of the conquest by the Roman Empire," illustrates Liviu Iancu, archaeologist and researcher at the Institute for Advanced Studies on the Culture and Civilization of the Levant in Bucharest.

The expert acknowledges that the theft is felt in the country as a blow to the national identity. "The modern Romanian state was built from 1848 onwards on the basis of a national ideology that emphasized, in a simplistic manner and in tune with the European spirit of the time, the Dacian and Roman origin of the Romanian people," he points out. "Unlike in Western Europe, where nationalism as an ideology faded away after 1945, in Romania it was recovered and cultivated by the communists, perpetuating itself in forms not unlike those of the 19th century and today," notes Iancu, who also regrets the "chronic lack of funding and the opacity of historical heritage in Romania: "Although Romanian political elites often resort to a rudimentary use of history and national pride to win the votes of citizens, in reality numerous archaeological sites are destroyed, many museums are in an advanced state of decay, and specialized personnel are paid subsistence wages and even humiliated." As examples, he says that most of the National Museum of History in Bucharest has been closed since 2002 and that the Geta fortress of Argedava, located 20 kilometers from the capital, with a historical importance similar to the [Spanish Numantia](#), is partially covered with garbage and destroyed by the expansion of a cemetery.

According to analysts, the drama of the Drents museum has generated a national trauma, from the shamans of national mysticism to the government, including the

astonishment of citizens. For Ioan Stanomir, professor of Constitutional Law at the University of Bucharest, the theft "has become a topic of electoral debate in Romania in 2025, with a discourse shaped not by science, but by demagogic inflammation rooted in the cardboard story made by national Stalinism, through history and cinema." "The whole of Romania seems to be at the center of a plot with infernal ramifications," he bellows, before remarking that the helmet of Coțofenești, which dates back to the first half of the 4th century BC and was discovered by chance by a child in 1927, "is the symbol of an entire nation deprived of its right to preserve its origins."

"The current [electoral fight between the dominant pro-Western political forces and the extreme right](#), which accuses the West of exploitation and makes a fanciful and unscientific appeal to Dacian antiquity as a model of independence and sovereignty, a fight that even led to the annulment of the presidential elections, one can easily understand that the theft of the treasure objects unleashed the perfect storm in Romania," remonstrates Iancu.