

France Adopts Bill on Cultural Property Restitution Reform



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Paris: The French National Assembly on Wednesday approved a draft law aimed at reforming the restitution of cultural property acquired through illicit appropriation, following renewed parliamentary debate.

The bill was adopted with 141 votes in favor and none against, although turnout remained

relatively low compared to the chamber's total of 577 seats.

The legislation establishes a clearer legal framework for returning cultural assets obtained through illicit means, including looting, theft, and coerced sales. It applies to cultural property acquired between 1815 and 1972, excluding military items and certain archaeological objects.

Under France's principle of the inalienability of public collections, cultural objects could previously only be returned to their countries of origin through individual legislative approval on a case-by-case basis.

The Senate initially passed the draft law on January 29, followed by a revised version approved by the National Assembly on April 13 with 170 votes in favor and none against. Differences between the two versions led to a joint committee of deputies and senators, which finalized a compromise text on April 30.

The bill now requires final approval from the Senate in a scheduled review before it can be enacted into law.

The reform is seen as a step toward streamlining restitution procedures and strengthening international cultural cooperation while maintaining legal safeguards for national collections.