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Abstract

The existence of displaced foreign cultural treasures held in Russia has been one of the dramatic revelations since the collapse of the Soviet Union, while Russia's failure to return them to the countries of their provenance has become one of the most thorny elements in Russia's foreign relations. Five years ago, when accepted as a member of the Council of Europe in January 1996, Russia committed itself to the restitution of cultural treasures and, specifically, archives. Despite this commitment, restitution matters are not moving rapidly in Russia and continue to engender controversies, although there have also been symbolic breakthroughs and some areas of progress. This article examines the background and recent history of these restitution efforts and controversies, focusing mainly on archives, but also considering library books and works of art.