Mercouri, Melina (1925 - 1994)

Greek actor and politician. As minister of culture 1981–89 and 1993–94, she was a tireless campaigner for the arts both at home and within the European Community, and campaigned in particular for the return of the Elgin Marbles to Greece from the UK. As an actor she gained international recognition in the film *Never on Sunday* (1960), in which she played an exuberantly cheerful prostitute.

**Film career** Born in Athens into a political family (her grandfather was four times elected the city's mayor), Mercouri embarked on an acting career, coming to notice outside Greece in the film *Stella* (1955), playing the sort of extravagantly emotional role with which she was later most readily associated. Her subsequent film career included appearances in international productions such as *The Victors* (1963), but was closely associated with director Jules Dassin, her husband from 1966. Their films together included a histrionic modern-dress version of *Phaedra* (1962) and the commercially successful comedy thriller *Topkapi* (1964).

**Political career** Mercouri was in the USA at the time of the 1967 military coup in Greece and was stripped of her nationality. She campaigned vocally against the colonels’ regime, and in 1977, three years after their fall, was elected to parliament for Andreas Papandreou’s PASOK party. She represented until her death the constituency of Peiraias (in which the film *Never on Sunday* had been set). When PASOK took power, she was appointed culture minister.

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