



Athens, 18 June 2025

### **Ministry of Culture: Illuminating the Walls to Showcase Byzantine Thessaloniki**

At a press conference held today at the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Minister of Culture, Lina Mendoni, presented the lighting project of the City's Byzantine Walls, joined by METLEN's representative Vivian Bouzali, Chief Corporate Affairs and Communication Officer, and the project's designer, Eleftheria Deko, in the presence of the city's Mayor, Stelios Angeloudis.

The lighting study, generously funded by METLEN, is part of the Ministry of Culture's strategic plan to promote cultural heritage and establish development hubs of major cultural significance. Prepared by Eleftheria Deko's office, the study will be implemented in two phases. In the first phase, both the interior and exterior of the northwestern and northeastern walls of the Acropolis, along with the Eptapyrgio fortress, will be illuminated. The second phase will involve the lighting of the city's western walls. The project is scheduled for completion by the end of 2026. The illumination will visually unify this significant architectural complex of the Byzantine city, highlighting its historical significance and strengthening its identity as a landmark.

Minister of Culture, Lina Mendoni, stated: "The Walls of Thessaloniki, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1988, are among the most imposing and significant fortification complexes of the Byzantine Empire. Today, with approximately 4.5 kilometers still preserved, they continue to shape the city's cultural landscape and serve as vital evidence of Thessaloniki's long history. Because of their significance, the Ministry of Culture has consistently shown particular care for their protection and promotion. Especially in recent years, through the competent Ephorate of Antiquities of Thessaloniki City, we have been implementing a project for the conservation and protection of the northern, northwestern, and western walls, scheduled for completion by the end of 2026, with notable benefits to the urban environment in the densely built western areas of the city. Thanks to METLEN's generous sponsorship, this unique fortification complex—one of the city's main landmarks—is being brought to light, both literally and symbolically, revealing its magnitude, importance, and historical role to citizens and visitors alike. The lighting emphasizes the volume, structure, and geometry of the walls, offering a new visual experience to all. The

project was designed with deep respect for the environment and the historical character of both the monument and the city. I sincerely thank METLEN and its President, Evangelos Mytilineos, for this generous contribution to the promotion of Thessaloniki's exceptional cultural heritage."

Vivian Bouzali, representing METLEN, remarked: "METLEN's journey in Thessaloniki is clearly marked by investments, but above all by a deep sense of responsibility. Our decision to support the lighting of the Castles reflects a meaningful commitment to offer the city a project of high aesthetic value, with full respect for the archaeological identity of the site. If one word captures how we feel today, it is 'respect'. Respect for history. For culture. For the city. For its people. Because the Walls of Thessaloniki represent identity, memory, the physical imprint of time—not wearing away, but connecting. Just like Thessaloniki itself: a city of depth, intensity, and culture. This is the experience we wanted to illuminate—not merely to light up a monument, but to illuminate a part of the city's soul."

Eleftheria Deko stated: "It is a great honor, and we warmly thank the Ministry of Culture, the Mayor of Thessaloniki, and sponsor company METLEN for entrusting us with this emblematic project. Lighting holds power at night, but it also carries symbolism during the day. Beyond illuminating a monument, it tells a story—of culture, history, and timelessness. In this case, it reflects the entire city of Thessaloniki. The aim of the lighting study is to highlight the monument in a way that respects its historical and architectural character. It seeks to make its volume and geometry legible from both close and distant viewpoints, without disturbing residents—carried out with great care and a sense of responsibility."

Mayor of Thessaloniki, Stelios Angeloudis, commented: "Lighting is culture, development, innovation—it is the future that strengthens our collective confidence. I would like to thank the Ministry of Culture and in particular Minister Lina Mendoni, who once again responded immediately to my call, allowing this unparalleled visual experience to become part of daily life for both citizens and visitors of the city. Equally decisive was the support of METLEN and Evangelos Mytilineos, whose decision to cover the project's costs redefines the very meaning of corporate social responsibility—honoring the past, creating the present, and shaping the future."

The Byzantine Walls of Thessaloniki are among the most imposing fortification works of the Byzantine Empire. Since the city's founding by Cassander in 316/315 BC, it was protected by strong walls, which played a crucial role in safeguarding its population over the centuries. During the Byzantine period, the fortifications evolved into an 8-kilometer perimeter wall, reinforced with towers and a moat, culminating at the Acropolis. In the late Byzantine era, the Eptapyrgio (Heptapyrgion) was established

there, serving as the last line of defense for the city's residents. Under Ottoman rule, it housed the local administration and, from the 1890s, functioned as a prison.

Today, only 4.5 km of the original perimeter survive. Yet, the monument continues to dominate the modern cityscape, defining the historic core of Thessaloniki. The preserved sections—with numerous towers and gates—are invaluable witnesses to the city's long history. They bear traces of interventions by both renowned emperors and anonymous benefactors, who restored the walls after each destruction.

With the new lighting, the public will gain a renewed visual experience—one that brings to light the scale, grandeur, and historical significance of Thessaloniki.