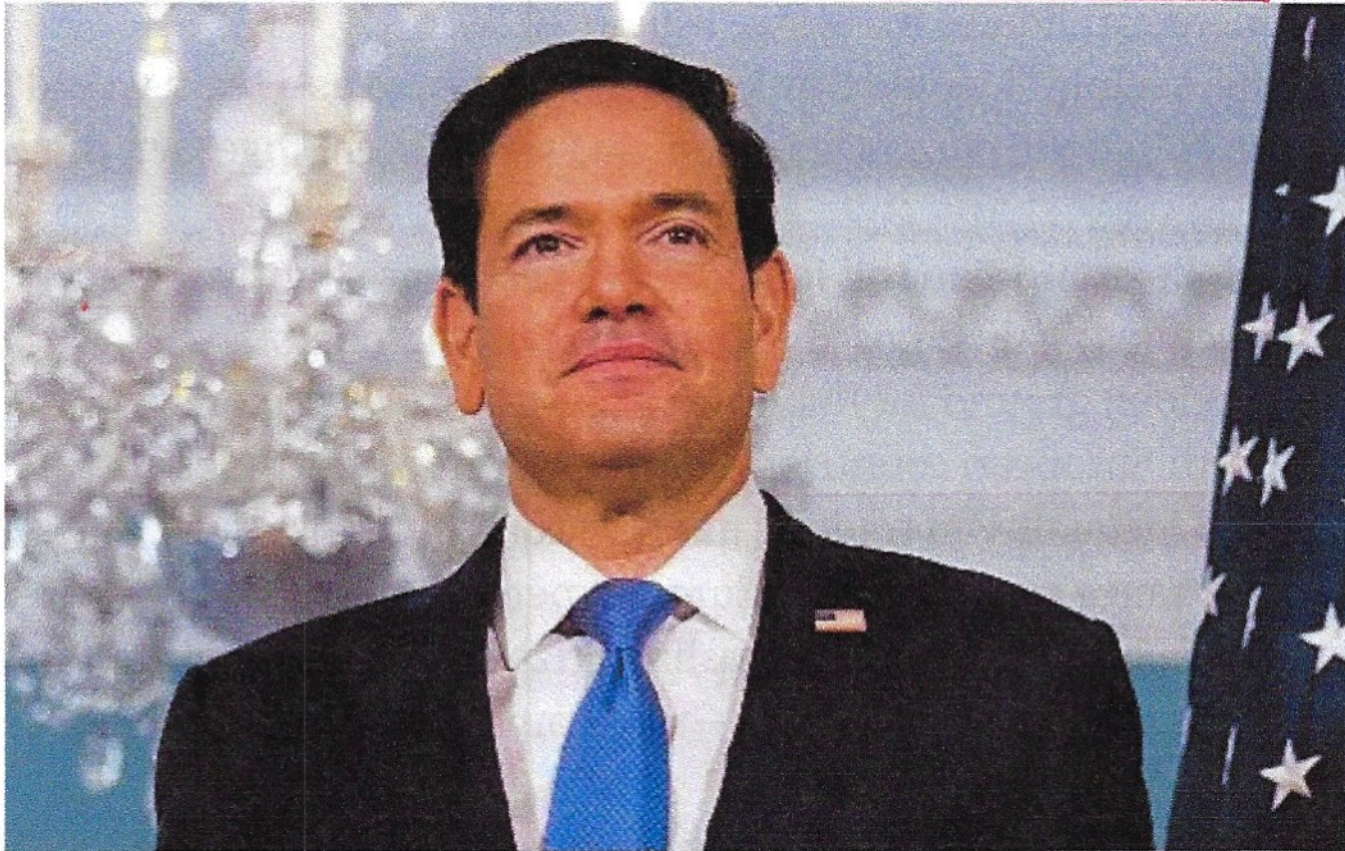


Rubio's rallying cry for the West stoke 2028 embers

GTK

The Denver Gazette · 8 Oct 2026 · A19

Secretary of State Marco Rubio delivered a landmark speech in Athens on Wednesday in which the chief diplomat urged fellow Western powers to recognize a common heritage and shared future. But following the philosophical manifesto — which name-dropped figures such as Aristotle, Plato, and Plutarch — reactions focused on his statesmanlike persona instead of the message.



The setting of Rubio's speech was almost overpowering in its symbolism. Speaking at sunset from the Pnyx, where the ancient Athenian assembly used to gather, the secretary of state had the enviable backdrop of the Acropolis of Athens.

In his less-than-subtle tribute to the "cradle of democracy," he lauded the Ancient Greeks for their ideas of "fierce individuality and relentless ambition, daring exploration and invention, a yearning for discovery, for adventure, risk, and glory, and insatiable curiosity about the world and the principles by which it operates, a hunger to know the mysteries of nature, and grasp the secrets of the cosmos." He characterized these qualities as the spirit of Western civilization, which permeates all of Europe and the United States up to the modern day.

"These were not just the formulas or precepts of a particular school of philosophy," Rubio told the crowd. "They were the characteristic of a people — expressed in their tradition, their stories, their imagination, and the qualities that they demanded of their citizens and the things they lived and fought and died for. To know them is to know ourselves. What blossomed here, in this place, was the Western desire to uncover all that ignorance, darkness, and distance, had kept hidden from the mind of man." Public commentators and the legacy media spent little time discussing the merits of his address and largely focused on the optics, while trying to reconcile it with Rubio's stated disinterest in running for president in 2028.

“Well, normally I would look at a speech like that and say it was the opening shot in the 2028 race,” Fox News host John Roberts said following the address, “But Marco Rubio has said he’s not running.” Dennis Lennox, a Republican strategist, told the Washington Examiner it compared to former President Ronald Reagan’s ‘A Time for Choosing’ speech in 1964.

“Quite the speech [...] from Rubio for someone who supposedly isn’t running for president,” he said. Rubio has repeatedly insisted that he has no plans to campaign for the presidency in the next election and is instead focused on his current roles as state secretary and national security adviser.

“I don’t know what the future holds, but I have no plans at this time,” Rubio told Colombian outlet RCN last month. “I’m not a candidate for anything right now. And I’m 100 percent focused on my job, and I have to be because I have two jobs.”

Regardless of his stated perspective, President Donald Trump has repeatedly gestured toward Rubio and Vice President JD Vance as the preeminent candidates to replace him in 2028.

He floated a Vance–Rubio joint ticket in June, saying, “I would think that JD and Marco as a team would be very hard to beat. It’s interesting, human thing, the human equation. So I watch them together, they get along great.”

A survey published in August by Emerson College and The Hill found Rubio performs slightly better than Vance in hypothetical presidential matchups against possible Democratic contenders.

The future of Western civilization is well-trodden ground for Rubio, who has prioritized in foreign policy a pursuit of mutual understanding with European countries put off by Trump’s anti-globalist policies that often punish allies for perceived inequality in trade or military contributions.

Rubio has been in lock-step with Trump and Vance on diagnosing Europe’s perceived social ills — particularly those caused by mass immigration, failure to assimilate Muslim citizens, overcommitment to green energy policy, defensive atrophy, and regulatory bureaucracy — and conveyed that position Wednesday on the hilltop.

“We opened our borders, and outsourced our industry, and allowed our militaries to wither and to decay,” Rubio said from the hilltop. “And with every passing year, we seem to outsource more of our sovereignty, transferring our decisions to global bureaucracies far beyond the reach of our control. But others were all too happy to fill the vacuum left behind by our weakness.”

“Today, we find ourselves at a crossroads because the next decade and the decisions we make will write the story of the next century,” he said. “The course we take will determine whether the West maintains its place at the head of the world, or resigns itself to a future of atrophy, servitude, and decline. We will either choose to act now, or lose the choice to act at all. Under President Trump, the United States has made its choice.”

In the White House’s latest National Security Strategy, the administration stated bluntly that it fears the prospect of “civilizational erasure” in Europe, believing that “should present trends continue, the continent will be unrecognizable in 20 years or less.”

This rhetoric from the U.S. government has frequently ruffled feathers among European leaders, who claim it is inappropriate for American leaders to pressure their continent toward their desired foreign policy.

At the Acropolis, he says the West can revive itself by recalling its historic virtues and ambition.

Rubio Gets to the Heart of the Matter

The Western world is having a crisis of confidence, moral and political, and it is eroding its prosperity and the will to defend its principles. For a bracing and timely antidote, we recommend Marco Rubio's speech Wednesday at the Acropolis in Greece.

It's the speech of the year by our lights. The Secretary of State is on a diplomatic swing through Europe, and he met with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who has led that country's economic revival. Mr. Rubio also took the opportunity to visit the Pnyx, near the Acropolis, that great symbol of Western civilization, and remind us of the history and ties that bind Europe and America.

"Here, in Athens, we found the first full realization of all the essential traits that would come to define the West," Mr. Rubio said: "fierce individuality and relentless ambition; daring exploration and invention; a yearning for discovery, for adventure, risk and glory. An insatiable curiosity about the world and the principles by which it operates, a hunger to know the mysteries of nature and grasp the secrets of the cosmos."

He then connected those traits to the West's achievements. "This was the foundation of the Western mind: our math, our science, our medicine. Our philosophy, ethics, and religion. . . . It was the foundation of the riches of Christian theology—of Augustine and Aquinas, and the whole tradition of natural law."

It isn't often these days that you hear a politician speak of "the West," much less make the essential connection between our own day and our inheritance from Athens and Jerusalem. Would that we heard it more.

Mr. Rubio moved on with an honest appraisal that "today, too much of the West has forgotten this quality. Over time, we in the West came to feel ashamed of the very things that made us exceptional. We felt embarrassed that our achievements set us apart from the rest of the world. Our prosperity somehow became a source of guilt. We no longer believed we deserved and had earned our greatness." Visit an Ivy League campus any day of the week to see what Mr. Rubio means. Our enemies, the Secretary of State says, have been only too happy to fill the vacuum left by Western self-doubt. "National interests did not vanish in the face of international institutions. War did not disappear simply because we preferred peace. . . . And now, there is war again. There is new competition between great powers again. There is vulnerability, aggression, terrorism, a whole universe of new threats and attacks again."

So the West is at "a crossroads," and "the course we take will determine whether the West maintains its place at the head of the world, or resigns itself to a future of atrophy and servitude and decline. We will either choose to act now, or lose the choice to act at all."

As a senior Trump official, Mr. Rubio says the U.S. is attempting to lead a Western revival. But importantly, he didn't chastise Europe as others in the Administration have done. He asked Europe to join America in this great endeavor, and he even pointed to green shoots that it may be doing so.

Mr. Rubio's speech is all the more notable because it comes in an age of impoverished political rhetoric. Narrow partisanship and sniping rule the day on left and right. Mr. Rubio is describing a larger ambition that connects the best of the West's past to a better future. Our view is that Americans are aching for this kind of vision and leadership, and they will respond to someone who offers it.

The following is a digital replica of content from the print newspaper and is intended for the personal use of our members. For commercial reproduction or distribution of Dow Jones printed content, contact: Dow Jones Reprints & Licensing at (800) 843-0008 or visit djreprints.com.

For personal, non-commercial
use only.