

Puerto Rico Ponders Site for Tsereteli Statue

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SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — Zurab Tsereteli's towering statue of Christopher Columbus shunned by several U.S. cities may finally find a home on an uninhabited Puerto Rican island.

Local lawmaker David Bonilla filed a resolution asking the government to study the viability of installing the roughly 600-ton bronze statue, which is twice the height of the Statue of Liberty without its pedestal, on the tiny island of Desecheo.

The statue began its ill-fated, two-decade journey in 1991, when it was built by Moscow-based sculptor Tsereteli to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Columbus' 1492 arrival in the Western Hemisphere.

It was rejected by New York, Miami, Baltimore and other cities for reasons ranging from cost to appearance before finally being accepted by Puerto Rico.

The statue shows Columbus at the wheel of a tiny ship with three billowing sails behind him. Critics have said the explorer's arms are too long, the head too small and his one-handed

greeting pose silly.

The Puerto Rican plan was to erect the statue in Catano, a seaside suburb of San Juan. But residents protested because the move called for demolishing several dozen homes, and problems arose with airplane flight paths.

The statue was then proposed for Mayaguez, but an appropriate location was never found. It has been in storage in Mayaguez ever since.

Bonilla said setting up the statue on Desecheo would help attract more tourists to Puerto Rico's western region. The island is closed to the public, but its waters attract divers.

The Puerto Rican Congress has yet to approve the proposal.

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