

Speech by the Prime Minister at the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Stavros Niarchos Foundation for Upgrading and Enhancing the Health Sector in Greece

I would like to extend a warm “thank you” to Andreas Dracopoulos and all his associates, because I believe that today is a very important day for all Greek citizens. This is because the grant by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, apart from an important act of social responsibility, is also—I dare say—a major investment. It is an investment that is different from others, in that its reward is not profit, in financial terms. Its reward, its purpose if you will, is social benefit. Its reward is the millions of our fellow citizens who will have access to upgraded Public Health infrastructure and services.

On behalf of the whole nation, I would like to thank the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, and, personally, I would like to thank Andreas Dracopoulos, for this grant, whose budget may reach 250 million euros; an investment that will certainly reap rewards.

But I also want to say thank you, because the Foundation, through its work, gives a different meaning to the way one can contribute. There is no doubt that all donations are useful. Of course, no one is questioning the good intentions of those who carry out this important work and contribute to our country, especially in a period of crisis. What is most important is the reasoning behind one’s actions. And in this case, the reasoning behind almost all of the Foundation’s activities in Greece moves beyond appearances to the true essence of things.

About a year ago, while discussing here at the Maximos Mansion with Andreas Dracopoulos—if I remember correctly, the great architect Renzo Piano was also part of the discussion—he spoke to me about the idea of providing major, substantial help to the Health sector. Where, especially during the last years of budgetary constraints, we’ve been through major difficulties, which have had an impact on the vast majority of the Greek people, i.e., the more vulnerable groups of our society. Those who have the financial means find ways through private healthcare.

His idea was impressive: we should completely change Evangelismos Hospital. That is, to spend all the money on the modernization of a single hospital. I told him: “That is a great idea. But, with all this money—that is far from little—Evangelismos is outside the public budget, which has been cut in the years of the crisis, shouldn’t we try and creatively integrate these funds into the entire health system structure?” I asked him to discuss the matter with our two competent Ministers. Indeed, the Ministers said that our greatest needs were things that others would consider minor. But, when these needs can be covered outside the public budget, that is a benefit for us. And so, today, we have a comprehensive plan, which I believe can provide major, substantial help in our efforts to reconstruct the public Health system.

I believe the grant comes at a crucial moment, as this country is slowly exiting the crisis, when the dominant perception of the public Health system is also changing. It is no longer viewed as an unnecessary financial burden. The shrinking and downgrading of healthcare services and infrastructure has been halted for three years now. I believe that slowly, but steadily, a reverse course has begun. This is a substantial reinforcement and, ultimately, reestablishment of the universality of healthcare for all those living in this country - regardless of income, insurance status, social position, origin or any other classification.

We are implementing—and will continue to implement—this effort with even more resources, as our allowances continue to expand. This is because, for at least three years now, this “party” of pillaging the public Health sector has stopped. Because, in my opinion, this was

an insult to the Greek people. Especially, during the years of forced budget cuts. This “party,” and this pillaging, at the expense of the insured, to the detriment of the retired and all those in need of medication, this “party” was an insult, and it is now time for justice.

Dear friends,

I would like to say that this grant by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, which we are effectively ratifying today, is not a novel event. It is not a novel event because we all know that for more than twenty years, the Foundation has been supporting specific philanthropic actions. And, with regard to recent years, I believe that our close collaboration in the field of Health has paid dividends.

Allow me to repeat some of what we have seen in the video. I want to repeat them as recognition of this important contribution. With this grant, totaling 14 million euros, 143 ambulances have been acquired, delivered, and distributed nationwide, serving the needs of citizens. I think it is difficult to compare. I repeat: each contribution has its own value. For example, in the village of Anogia, where I happen to know there was a great feast on Sunday with the Minister and the Deputy Minister in attendance, an ambulance is a very important thing. Well, 143 ambulances have been allocated. These vehicles also include mobile units, which are absolutely essential, particularly for dealing with emergencies.

Furthermore, these include mobile units for infants, which cover a real need, especially for regions in rural Greece, which unfortunately have never had this capability.

Moreover, ten linear accelerators were delivered to the country’s university hospitals and to the Theageneio Anticancer Hospital of Thessaloniki, to cover the needs of cancer patients.

In addition, they also implemented crucial interventions, such as the procurement of CT scanners for public hospitals, including, KAT, Erythros Stavros and Sotiria. Three hospitals, which receive hundreds of patients on a daily basis. Thousands of citizens visit these hospitals.

Lastly, they are implementing many other grants: targeted infrastructure interventions, the further outfitting of medical units, the provision of additional mobile medical units for medical examinations, particularly in the countryside, as well as the support of training programs for medical and nursing staff.

As we can see, everything we’ve done so far in these three years is just the beginning. Because now, with the grant that we are honored and delighted to accept on behalf of all Greeks, we are proceeding with a new large project of extensive interventions to support public Health.

This project that includes seven key actions:

First: The design, construction and outfitting of the new General Hospital of Komotini. This is a major project in a city of Thrace, which is undoubtedly extremely important for our homeland. I had the opportunity to appreciate the significance of this project at the recent Regional Development Conference in Komotini, where representatives of many local bodies and institutions informed me of this project’s importance, and how it will change their everyday lives.

Second: The design, construction and outfitting of the Children’s Hospital in Thessaloniki. Finally, Thessaloniki, the co-capital, a large urban center, acquires a Children’s Hospital. Perhaps it should have acquired one decades ago. In these days of fiscal prudence, such a proclamation should defy logic. But we’ve managed to achieve this, thanks to your help and support, and that is very important, because this hospital will be able to cover all the needs of Northern Greece and part of Thessaly.

Third: The design, construction and outfitting of the Nursing Sisters' building at Evangelismos Hospital, with the purpose of operating as the Chair of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens' Faculty of Nursing.

Fourth: The procurement and installation of new medical equipment at Evangelismos Hospital.

Fifth: The procurement of new air transport vehicles and the service of existing ones aiming to strengthen EKAV's air ambulance services. I really want to stress how important this is for our fellow citizens living on our islands. They may, of course, feel that they are living in a natural environment of unparalleled beauty, but they also feel exposed, insecure, often like second-class citizens, especially when they are faced with accidents, which is a very normal thing, even for tourists, particularly during the summer months. Now, we have built a safe system, where we can have swift transfers to hospitals, not only in the capital, but also hospitals that are now operating on our islands, such as Syros, and Santorini, where we fought for a building that had been ready for years, but was abandoned due to other interests. With your help, we are building a safety net for our islanders and our tourists.

Sixth: The procurement and installation of specialized medical equipment, such as the *PET Scanner*, as doctors call it—and there are many doctors in the room today. We are of course talking about Positron Emission Tomography, and the creation of radiopharmaceutical production units in selected health care providers, including university hospitals.

And, seventh: The financing of the formulation and implementation of educational programs on hospital infections and the treatment of trauma.

So, these are all the actions, which not only cover gaps, important gaps, not only fill "holes," but also, I think, help form a foundation, on which we can continue to build on better terms. I believe that from now on, we must also make a commitment, a State commitment, and I want to make this commitment, friends, that we will take all the appropriate measures to avoid even the slightest procedural obstacle, the slightest bureaucratic impediment. This is not so easy in Greece, so this commitment is critical in order to ensure the timely and comprehensive implementation of everything we are about to sign.

And, of course, as the Greek government, we will seek a close and effective collaboration with the people of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation throughout the course of the projects.

After all, I believe that there is a positive precedent for our cooperation and its effectiveness, in the case of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center, a jewel that adorns the capital's exit to the sea, at the Faliron Delta.

I believe I have extensively referred to the importance and weight of this grant for society at large. Allow me, however, to conclude with a reference to a distinct and special aspect of today's occasion and its significance. I believe it honors our country to have the respect and appreciation of people whose work enjoys universal recognition and who are pioneers in their field.

I spoke a moment ago about our meeting with Renzo Piano. Renzo Piano is an internationally renowned architect. He is the man responsible for designing this jewel of the coastal front, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center, which is the Foundation's largest single gift to the citizens of our country.

Renzo Piano is also the architect who will be responsible for the design of the three new hospitals in Komotini, Thessaloniki (the Children's Hospital) and Athens. It is certain that his involvement guarantees, not only the immaculate design in terms of the new institution's

needs, but a high-quality aesthetic intervention, which is also important for the environment and the image of our cities.

The support offered by the SNF to the Public Health system is an exemplary initiative, with great social and national symbolism, and a true investment in the future of this country. I believe that Health and Education, are two of the main pillars on which we can structure the development of our path as a society. In this context, I believe this example is an example which, I repeat, concerns matters of the essence of things, not appearance; of doing something essential for the majority of the citizens. I wish that this example will be welcomed, and followed by other donors or grantmaking institutions that want to contribute through a collaboration with the State, in areas where we are really hurting; to set up structures in order to be able to carry our country and our society into the future.

I believe that this substantial investment in the future of Greece takes place during a time when we can once again be hopeful about the future, albeit cautiously. It is obvious to all of us that the greatest difficulties are now behind us. The most crucial element of today is the ability to structure the future on more solid foundations this time. I believe, therefore, that we can be optimistic in thinking that the future is once again in our hands. In this context, everything we are signing here today is crucial to this future.

Once again, a big “thank you” to everyone, and I hope that this example is followed by others who also wish to contribute. Take care.