

Good afternoon!

Welcome to Greece, welcome to Athens, and welcome to the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center (SNFCC). I am honored to have been asked to give the opening remarks at this year's GEN Summit.

The world is indeed in turmoil; then again, what's new?

Maybe what is new is the immense frustration all around the world, frustration manifested by the people at large revolting against the system. Wealth and income extreme disparities, intense competition all around, the deterioration of hope, etc., etc. all contribute to an overwhelming frustration with all that has anything to do with those in power. This frustration is gaining traction almost on a daily basis and it is affecting our everyday lives throughout the world.

Some say that liberal democracy itself is under threat; I beg to differ, democracy as we know it is under threat by way of many pillars of what constitute a true democracy being under attack. Alternatively, in some cases, weaknesses in those pillars are simply being exposed during this ongoing tension.

The press, in all its forms, is one of those integral pillars of democracy that are going through tough times. For many, media at large is part of the problem, for others, and I belong in the latter camp, it can also at the same time be part of the solution; but a lot of hard work has to be done by all involved in the area of the media. That work is more critical now than ever, and it must be done in the face of complex, evolving challenges without precedent in the field of journalism.

The extreme degree of polarization—in politics, in civics, and even in everyday life—is eating us alive. The media plays a big part in this problem, and it usually starts from the top, from owners of media who, consciously or not, get involved to serve their own agendas and not serve the public, as I believe they should.

Just like anyone who gets involved in politics, anyone who gets involved in the media should believe in the integral mission of serving the people. With the powerful position the media occupies comes a powerful responsibility—as well as a powerful opportunity to implement ethical standards and values at the top that set the tone for true civic discourse. The pen, or nowadays, the keyboard, is truly mightier than the sword; but so is your responsibility to perform your duties in an ethical, responsible, professional way.

In every profession, we all sometimes may ask ourselves why we got into that field. In the field of philanthropy as well as of journalism, we have to ask ourselves continually whether our work is truly serving the public good. For our part, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) is an international philanthropic organization that makes grants—over 4,500 grants totaling more than \$2.7 billion since our founding in 1996—in the areas of

arts and culture, education, health and sports, and social welfare. In each of these areas, the SNF has no agenda beyond supporting non-profit organizations with sound leadership that are working to make positive and lasting changes in society.

The building we are now in, the SNFCC, was created through the largest grant SNF has made to date. When the idea for this project originated well more than a decade ago, even we ourselves could not believe how successful the project would be; and by success I purely mean the impact it has had to people in Athens, Greece, and beyond, in terms of providing a free, quality, safe public space where every visitor can have a true sense of ownership, fulfillment, and even, yes, pride. Greece and Athens were different then, not yet touched by the serious economic and social crisis that roiled the country starting a decade ago. With no agenda other than to provide a comprehensive resource for the public, the SNFCC was delivered to the Greek people in 2017, and last year alone it received 5.3 million visits. What remained constant from the inception of the idea, through Greece's crisis, and still holds today is that this place responds to a real demand—a real need.

Regardless of the challenges that journalism and the media face today and will encounter in the years to come, there will likewise always be a real need for independent journalism, excellent reporting, and ethical media. Of course, even with this enduring need, good results will not come automatically. Meeting challenges in the field will require keeping sight of big abstract values while working hard to carefully attend to a million little details. But what is editing if not just that?

You are not alone in this project. Like many others, the SNF is asking ourselves what we can do to contribute, without any agenda beyond offering hopefully effective support, to the production of excellent independent journalism as an essential pillar of democracy around the world.

We have partnered with Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism to give emerging Greek journalists the skills they need to take their work to the next level and are collaborating with the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C., on a Journalism Boot camp for students from around the world. We support Bloomberg Media Initiative Africa's Financial Journalism Training Program, and just a few days ago, Athens Photo World brought hundreds of photographers and photojournalists together here at the SNFCC.

We also helped initiate a new non-profit organization, based in Athens but active worldwide, with the aim of providing a launch pad for supporting new ideas, opportunities and excellence in journalism and media at large. The name of this endeavor is iMEdD, which stands for "incubator for Media Education and Development." Through iMEdD's Ideas Zone, journalism students, graduates, and professionals exchange ideas with experienced professionals from Greece and abroad through three-month thematic sessions. Additionally, the iMEdD incubator hosts individuals and

groups who wish to create an organization or implement specific innovative projects, and offers the necessary expertise, strategic guidance, networking opportunities, and state-of-the-art equipment to help them come to life. All in all, a mission of building the hub of a new age in journalism, for for-profit and non-profit organizations as well as for individuals and professionals, embracing and engaging all, based on transparency, credibility, independence, meritocracy, excellence in an interactive and innovative way. And all this emanating from a core team of seven committed industry professionals, led by Anna Bousdoukou, and who all recognize the need to change from within.

Henry Timms and Jeremy Heimans in their book *New Power* talk about how power works in our hyper-connected world.... and in an article, they co-authored for the Harvard Business Review they describe old power as currency, jealously guarded, held by a few, downloadable.... whereas new power operating like a current, most forceful when it surges, is open, participatory, and peer-driven, whose goal as it uploads is to be shared.... We, at the SNF, are very proud to have supported the creation of iMEDD and we hope more organizations like that start appearing globally.

More broadly, SNF seeks to reinforce the wider ecosystem of civil discourse and civic engagement of which journalism is a cornerstone. The flagship SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore (based at Hopkins but active and collaborating around the world), aims to bring together experts from fields such as political science, psychology, philosophy, ethics, and journalism to promote open and inclusive discourse. More important than that is its vision to embrace the public at large and provide a true sense of safe and productive space for anyone who wants to engage for the common good. Here in Greece, SNF's own monthly DIALOGUES series brings thinkers and doers from different backgrounds who inspire others with their vision into conversation.

Leonard Cohen, the late Canadian songwriter who liked to spend a lot of time here in Greece, spoke about the crack of light that exists everywhere, that is how, he said, the light gets in...We all have to keep working in our own lives to keep that crack open wide enough...

Truth matters. Facts matter. And civil discourse based on both, matters—now more than ever. Thank you for the important work you do, and for taking seriously your responsibility to do it ethically. On behalf of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, welcome to Athens and hope you have a productive conference.

Thank you.