

---

*Kathimerini piece*

---

In line with a pattern that started to develop at the onset of the Greek economic and social crisis in 2009, Greece continued to dominate the headlines for most of 2015 as well. Whether it was the negotiations with the troika, the referendum, capital controls, the need for debt relief, national elections, worsening social and economic conditions, or the refugee crisis, the conversation both internally and externally continued to revolve unabated around these and other related matters.

For one observing these developments somewhat from a distance, it becomes evident, sooner or later, that when it comes to Greece today the narrative remains the same, both inside and outside the country. It may assume different tones and hues, but its essence is fundamentally the same. Corruption, political ineptness, the bloated public sector, lack of reforms, tax evasion, a state-dependent private sector, austerity, poverty, economic stagnation, unemployment, brain drain, these are some of the issues that are part of the narrative about Greece today. They should be. However, this very narrative, this discourse, has assumed a life of its own and has started to control everything. It stands above and outside everything else and has become omnipotent. It is a narrative, a discussion, and a speech for the sake of speech that continues to grow and dominate. It effectively carries no possibility of action and consequently no possibility of meaningful change. It is noise that is itself beginning to swallow and obliterate everything.

As we stand at the threshold between 2015 and 2016, and as we should be thinking of what needs to start happening in order for things to change in the New Year, I do believe we need a new beginning, a new speech, a new narrative, a new reality. Any hope for meaningful change starts with the need to establish a new public discourse. If we accept this fundamental premise, then we can start paying attention and debate openly the focus of this new narrative.

Institutions. Historically, the establishment of proper, well-performing, accountable, and effective public and private institutions, whether we talk about education, culture, health or governance itself, is a critical component and prerequisite for a well-functioning society. Since institutions enter and define public consciousness, they become a critical component of civic life. Any attempt to create a different narrative about Greece today, has to start with the rebuilding of public and private institutions under fundamentally different premises from the ones under which they operate today, institutions that are based on accountability, responsibility and respect.

Public domain. The emergence of an appropriate and redefined public domain is essential for the creation of a truly effective social welfare society. What is the definition of public domain? It is a space dominated by an emphasis on common interests and open processes, a space characterized by the three crucial values of accountability, responsibility and respect. Public domain as such is absent from today's Greece. What passes as public domain today is defined, in its entirety, by private interests and concerns, as well as secret processes. These are the

defining characteristics of a private rather than a public domain. The reassertion of a truly public domain in the midst of civic life constitutes a key step in the creation of a new narrative. Such narrative in order to be truly effective has to be built on proper collaboration of such institutions whether they come from the public, private, or not-for-profit domain.

Back to the basics: room to breath and room to hope. The story about Greece today is a story clad in superlatives and excesses. At a time when the discussion needs to be framed by simple, practical steps, it is rather framed by rhetoric and straightforward sophistry. At a moment when simple practical steps are required and a language of clarity, we seem to be guided by the fundamental tenet of the Second Sophistic: σκοτεινότης ίσον δεινότης. As a co-president of a global not-for-profit philanthropic organization (the Stavros Niarchos Foundation) that over a period of 20 years, and especially over the last 6 years, has provided significant support towards helping to alleviate the severe consequences of the Greek crisis, we have experienced first-hand, through our philanthropic efforts, first hand how crucial is to provide room to breath and room to hope during Greece's current dire predicament.

The Stavros Niarchos Foundation's three major initiatives, totaling €300 million (€100 million each) intended to give people under enormous pressure from the continuing crisis room and time to do something very simple but also very crucial: to have time and room to breathe, a respite from the suffering. Two of the initiatives, *Initiative Against the Greek Crisis I* (completed) and *II* (on-going) aimed at providing relief support, while the third, *Recharging the Youth Initiative*, (on-going), aims to help battle youth unemployment.

The Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center will be completed in 2016 and epitomizes the need to provide the country with room to hope. It bears witness to the importance of assuming a much larger responsibility right now, that of imagining a different vision of Greece's future, one that is defined by visible hope.

As children, all of us are defined by the ways others see us, by the stories that those around us tell us about ourselves, or by the ways we dream and imagine ourselves. These are just myths about who we are. The road to adulthood and to maturity requires that we smash the myths and figure out our true selves. For a long time now and certainly during the last few years Greece has appeared to be in a prolonged state of arrested development. Who we are as people and as a country is shaped by what others tell us about ourselves, and by the myths we keep nurturing about us (exceptionalism, etc.). The current crisis has highlighted this grave predicament. The way forward and the way out of it, requires the painful realization that the time has come for us to grow up, to get rid of the myths that have defined us for such a long time, and to create a new narrative, a new reality about ourselves that is based on a true understanding of who we really are. ABTTY (*Always Be True To Yourself*--I first saw it tattooed on the arm of my favorite NBA basketball player, Allan Iverson with the Philadelphia 76rs), is an essential prerequisite if we are to succeed. We cannot be true to anyone else if we don't become true to ourselves first, and as a Greek nation we simply have to do it.

2016 can hopefully be the year of the beginning of the writing of a new story, the year of the emergence of a radically different speech, the creation of a new beginning, a new reality.