

Kalimera!

Thank you all for joining us today for our 6th annual international conference on philanthropy. When we held our first such conference back in the early summer of 2012, the crisis in Greece and elsewhere was well in full force. At that time we thought that it would be a good idea to try to offer a very basic platform for individuals and for organizations to get together and discuss ideas to help alleviate the crisis, and more specifically how philanthropy could play an active and productive role towards this effort. We were happily surprised at the positive reaction of most participants and as a result we have continued to organize this annual conference hoping that it can keep providing a productive and enjoyable platform to facilitate an on-going active dialogue. We have also made the decision as of this year to integrate the conference into our Stavros Niarchos Foundation's (SNF's) annual week of activities at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center (SNFCC).

As most of you know, our Foundation donated the SNFCC fully to the Greek society, to the Greek people, just a few months ago during a delivery event that took place in this same Hall on the 23rd of February of this year. In twenty-one years of philanthropic giving, over 2 billion USD have been granted by the SNF in 113 countries all over the world, and the SNFCC, on time and on budget, with a total cost of approx. 850m USD remains our largest grant to date. As I elaborated in my delivery remarks back in February, all of us involved with the creation of the SNFCC invested much more than money and hard work, we all shared a common vision. The vision of the SNFCC was to create a beautiful cultural center which included the new homes of the National Library and of the National Opera of Greece, together with a 40 acre park, all for the absolute benefit of the people. The LEED platinum award for energy efficiency and environmental design that the SNFCC received has made us even prouder. Renzo Piano, a great architect, a magnificent person and a loyal friend of Greece, all of us at the SNF, the construction joint venture company and all of our special collaborators, the Government committees, etc., all worked tirelessly towards creating all the necessary conditions to give birth to what you see today, which is so much more than just physical beauty. What you see today is the epitome of an example of excellence, a project through which the people of Greece can believe again, can dream again, can hope again. A project owned by the Government, any Government, in a fiduciary role, truly owned by the people for the people. And well over 1 million people have visited the SNFCC since this time last year. More than 1 million people have voted with their feet, have spoken with their action, have embraced their own cultural center, they have realized they can believe again, good things can indeed happen even at the depth of this terrible socioeconomic crisis that has been deeply harassing Greece over the last almost decade by now.

They say that as parents we should do everything we can to establish strong roots for our children, and then we have to give them strong wings so they can fly, and the stronger the base the stronger the wings we have to provide... The SNF has tried its best to provide both to our child, the SNFCC, and we are proud to watch it as it flies away into its own future. And as parents, we will always follow its path very closely... with all that this may mean. All of us now just have to make sure that we really empower the SNFCC on an on-going basis not only to fly with its own wings, but also to follow and carve a new path for Greece as a whole. It is very critical that the SNFCC's ability to fly does not get affected by old 'habits'. The SNFCC can be a bright example for a new and improved way of making things happen in Greece, and not the other way around, this is imperative if the candle of hope is to remain brightly lit.

So there is no better place for the SNF to hold our conference than inside the SNFCC, during the SNF's summer Nostos festival. A sense of happiness, a sense of homecoming, a sense of the joyous feelings that early summer brings to all of us. A wide variety of artistic, educational, athletic, and fun activities have been taking place this week and we hope that everyone is enjoying them.

Truly public spaces, however, are not only physical spaces and one cannot expect that the mere creation of a space is enough to establish a sense of community, or to encourage the type of congregation and engagement that truly defines public spaces. The buildings and the park at the SNFCC cannot alone bring people together, cannot turn a space or a place into a community, a point of gathering, a *topos* for civic and civil engagement. It is through programming that is open, accessible, egalitarian, diverse, and all-encompassing and at the same time all-inclusive, that spaces such as this are transformed into true public spaces and centers of civic life. It has been our deep conviction since the early phases of this remarkable project that the public had a need for an inviting public space that would create a community by functioning as an embracing platform of creative expression, exploration and discovery, for anyone and everyone who wished to engage. That early conviction has proven to be justified. The

public has embraced the SNFCC and in doing so has manifested its potential to function as a much-needed public space during one of the most complicated and challenging times in Greece's modern history.

The SNFCC was also envisioned as an exemplary public-private partnership, in a country where you rarely experience successful examples of such a concept. But, as the project moved forward this very idea became a polarized one itself, and this polarization manifested itself in the public's doubts that the state can ever take over and operate successfully such a project. The SNFCC has continued to neutralize any manifestation of such polarization, as a result of a constant, transparent, civil, and efficient dialogue since its inception that aimed to include all the stakeholders and provide everyone involved with a project with a voice from the very beginning.

This year's rather long title of our conference is "Creativity, Imagination and the importance of reactivating public and ethical spaces in a highly polarized society". We feel proud that we have contributed towards the first part of our title with the creation of the great truly public space that the SNFCC represents. At the same time, we, as I am sure most of you are too, are very worried with what is happening around us with the terrible effects that polarization is having to all of us individually and to our communities at large all around the world. Polarization in general has penetrated almost every aspect of our lives, whether we see it or not, it is like a cancer of the soul, and it is becoming worse by the day. Civility is disappearing by the day...what is next?

It is time for each one of us to truly re-engage in civic life, and in a determined and civil way try to take back our lives before it is too late. I don't think there is a perfect end-result or solution in any possible way, but it is that bad that common sense alone should lead us all to stand up and work towards de-polarizing on all possible fronts. It is time to come clean, to re-engage and whether physically, mentally, or technologically, to stop hiding behind our comfort safe zones. Public spaces such as the SNFCC can play a pivotal role in this effort, but just as Michael Kimmelman, the New York Times architectural critic who yesterday evening engaged in a very interesting, warm, and soul searching discussion with Renzo Piano in this Hall, finished his article last year called "The craving for public squares", with, and I quote, "the perfect square, it turns out, is also a state of mind".

From this stage, created with the vision of beauty and excellence by the one and only Renzo Piano, from this stage that United States ex-President Obama spoke so eloquently about the importance of the responsibilities each one of us has as a 'citizen' and, and I quote, "...power and progress will always come from the demos—from 'We, the people', from this stage that carries the name of my great uncle and the SNF's founder, the late Stavros Niarchos, I thank you for being here and urge you to rise up to the occasion that today's challenges around us have imposed on each one of us. Thank you.