

Shared Sacred Sites

September 23, 2017

(MACEDONIAN MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART)

Good evening,

On behalf of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, I would like to begin by expressing our thanks to the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art for tonight's invitation. I would also like to thank all of you, for your presence here today.

The existence of shared sacred sites is a deep-rooted phenomenon in the Mediterranean, which applies absolutely to the city of Thessaloniki. The—at first glance—incompatibility of the three monotheistic religions actually results in the sharing of common sacred symbols, practices, places. With respect for the city's long history, the **"Shared Sacred Sites"** exhibition presents precisely this narrative, highlighting religious traditions through archival material, photographs and contemporary creations.

The Stavros Niarchos Foundation has assisted in the effort to capture this "sensitive" reality since its inception, by supporting the collaboration of institutions at an international level and enriching our collective knowledge. After all, strengthening and promoting Arts and Culture, as driving forces of prosperity and growth, is a fundamental pillar of the Foundation's philanthropic activity, alongside Social Welfare, Health & Sports, and Education.

The Foundation's largest single gift was developed based on the pillar of Culture, and that is the creation of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center. The project's total cost exceeded \$860 million, and it includes the new facilities of the National Library of Greece and the Greek National Opera, as well as the Stavros Niarchos Park.

Since 1996, the Foundation has committed more than \$2.4 billion, through almost 4,000 grants to nonprofit organizations in 113 nations around the world.

With the recent completion and delivery of the SNFCC to the Greek society, we decided to turn our attention to the support of the critical Health sector in Greece, which is of fundamental social value, with a series of infrastructure projects all across the country, expected to exceed \$240 million. These include the construction and outfitting of a Children's Hospital in Thessaloniki, in response to the decades-long need of the population in the wider region, which will act as a major health service and treatment hub for the whole of Northern Greece.

In Greece, in addition to our other, ongoing grants, we continue to respond to the urgent needs of the society, during the difficult circumstances of the past years, having nearly completed three major grant initiatives totaling approximately \$380 million. In this context, in 2015, the Foundation's Board of Directors approved a grant, totaling \$24 million towards the Municipalities of Athens and Thessaloniki, each of which manages a grant of €10 million, an indication of our commitment to effectively contribute to improving the day-to-day lives of our fellow citizens in the country's large urban centers.

In closing, I would like to once again thank the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art and all the individuals behind this ambitious project. We hope that it will play a constructive role in the debate on deeper understanding of the concept of religious coexistence.

Thank you,