

**The SNFCC and Public Private Partnerships as a Means of Promoting  
Social Welfare**

Dear Guests,

As you are aware, the acute crisis that Greece has been experiencing is well into its 6th year. This is a crisis that began as an economic crisis, but quickly evolved into a political, a social and a cultural crisis. It is now clear that we are experiencing, above all, a crisis of identity, orientation and values. We realize that the way we have been living has changed irreversibly. We have to rethink our manner of conduct and to reformulate our *modus vivendi*.

Before the crisis most people felt that they could create their own and their loved ones' enclave of happiness and prosperity solely by their own means. The creation of the conditions for the general social and collective welfare were seen as the responsibility of "somebody else". This "somebody else" in most cases was considered to be the state. The state was responsible for keeping parks and public spaces clean, for building and maintaining infrastructure, for ensuring that our children get a good education. This was our society before the crisis hit us: a society of *institutionalized individuals*.

The crisis, however, has put an abrupt end to the above situation. The burden of the provision of welfare is now diffused much more widely and creates moral imperatives for everyone with the means to do so, to contribute. Public

Private Partnerships (PPPs) are one of the methods that one has at their disposal in order to act according to the above moral imperative.

The Stavros Niarchos Foundation, having recognized the severity of the issues currently faced by Greece, has taken a number of initiatives. First, it took the *ad hoc* initiative to provide 100 million euro in additional support – above and beyond its regular activities – against the social impact of the major crisis plaguing our country. Second, the Foundation’s regular activities aim at complementing the actions of the state and have provided crucial funds and support for many NGOs that do vital work in the fields of general welfare in Greece and abroad.

The Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center, which is a combination of the above two types of initiatives, is implemented via a Public Private Partnership. The latter vary in subject matter, scope and methodology. However, there *are* common characteristics of such partnerships and the European Union’s Green Paper defines them. The Cultural Center has many of these characteristics and even goes beyond them, since upon completion the Center will be donated to the Greek state.

Moreover, the project represents a milestone for Public Private Partnerships in Greece, since it is one of the biggest and earliest such attempts in the country (the start of the project dates back to 2006). At the same time, it is an important PPP on a European level since only 10% of these in the European Union have an investment value greater than 500 million euros. The project

will cost more than 565 million euro. Last, but most importantly, most Public Private Partnerships above 500 million euros in the European Union refer to the sectors of Transport and Infrastructure. There are extremely few similar projects in Europe of the magnitude of the Stavros Niarchos Cultural Center in the sector of Culture and Education.

The main milestones of the project in terms of its collaboration with the public sector are the following:

The Stavros Niarchos Foundation recognized the needs of the general public, linked them with the needs of the National Library of Greece and the Greek National Opera, and presented the SNFCC as the solution to these needs.

The Greek state provides the land for the project and the Foundation shoulders the complete cost of the design and construction of the SNFCC. It also monitors its implementation and its delivery to the public.

While the Foundation has taken upon itself more than the normal share of risks that can be found in a traditional Public Private Partnership, there is one significant risk that the state and, indeed, the Greek public, assume. The Cultural Center must be maintained properly by the Greek state and must be loved and used by the public. When many others seem to have lost hope, the Foundation proves its faith and trust in Greece's potential. The Foundation is also confident that the residents of Greece will assume their role and responsibility in working together for the improvement of collective prosperity.

Finally, the SNF's initiative is an example that during these difficult times the non-state sector must work selflessly with the state in order to alleviate hardship, unlock potential and allow for a brighter future.

The Stavros Niarchos Cultural Center is not merely the symbol of a new era opening up for Greece; most of all, it is a tool that is given to the Greek state and the public and which provides wonderful new opportunities. Opportunities we have barely even dreamed of until today.

I invite you to join me on a virtual tour of the Center.

Let's begin with the library, which will be divided into two parts: firstly, the National Public Library and secondly, the National Research Library.

The National Library is a depository for Knowledge but it must be also be a place of live study. The research library will be connected to the universities and the country's broader academic life.

The public library will spread across the ground floor and part of the first floor of the building, an area of approximately 6000 square meters. It will not just be a place that enables people to access, explore, read and learn. It will be, foremost, a community hub, a place that stimulates human curiosity, that primal force that drives human creativity.

The same spirit of innovation will characterize the National Opera. We must aim just as high. The Opera has already achieved a lot. Its relocation to the new premises, however, entails new opportunities. An increase of business at the box office is not the prime objective here. It is probably unrealistic, anyway, to believe that something like that will happen under the current economic circumstances. It is more important to create a working environment that will support, encourage, promote and provoke activities that can build an audience that is intrinsically interested in opera, dance and other performing arts. We need to establish training programs to help teachers work with children and young people in and out of school; we must help artists bring their art to wider audiences. The opera can become a space for self-expression for many people.

The same creative aura will continue outdoors. In the Attica region of sunshine and fair weather, life takes place largely outside the building, in the open spaces. Thus the creative activities of the Library and the Opera will continue firstly in the Agora which links the Library to the Opera. Secondly and, most importantly, the activities will extend in the Park. The park will be much more than the Center's surrounding space. It will be a main ingredient of the Cultural Center. The public at the Stavros Niarchos Park, through a set of activities and events which will be organized by volunteers, NGOs, educators and mentors, will be in a position to learn how to make plans for collaborative exploration and how to cooperate in exploratory projects that have no predetermined outcome. These skills consistently appear to be at the top of the qualities that employers look for in the current economic

conundrum. Employers want to know that members of their team listen, observe, imagine and make hypotheses.

At the center, young people will exist side by side with the most vivacious and pioneering forces of the country. I would like to offer the following example, in order to illustrate the emphasis we are placing on the youth: a Visitors Center will soon open at the construction site and will serve as an information point for the Cultural Center, during the construction period of the latter. To create this light structure, we turned to undergraduate students from our country's Architectural schools. Right from the start, young people are actively involved in our project.

Our aim is to fill the SNFCC with life. We do not just want visitors. We want citizens who will participate in the creation of experiences.

Dear Guests,

Τόπος, place. That is how Renzo Piano, the architect of the SNFCC described the center in his initial drawings. The term "place" in my view means something genuine, natural, non-imposing; it expresses a real need and reflects the power of human creativity. "Topos" is the area nearby, the "Prosfigika" (old refugee settlements), where, even from the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Greeks from Asia Minor and Russia were accommodated and started a new life with hope and prospects. *Topos* will also be the Cultural Center for all the hard working, talented people, who, with respect and courage, are eager to learn, to share and to create the new Greece. That is what this project is worth and that is what the Stavros Niarchos Foundation is offering to my country.

Thank you.