

SPEECH OF ANDREAS DRACOPOULOS, SNF CO-PRESIDENT

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DELIVERY OF THE STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION CULTURAL CENTER TO THE GREEK SOCIETY

Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister, Dear friends,

On behalf of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Board (of which my colleagues Spyros Niarchos, George Agouridis and Heini Murer are with us here today; Philip Niarchos is very sorry, but he could not make it) and all of us at the Foundation, we welcome you and thank you for honoring us with your presence in today's event, celebrating the delivery of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center to the Greek State, the Greek society, to all of you. As of today, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center is officially YOURS!

I have many thoughts I wish to share with you and I don't know where to begin... Let me start with a few words on the history of the place where we are standing. According to archaeologists, one of the largest necropoleis (cemeteries) of Attica was located here during the Archaic period, next to the first port of ancient Athens, before 492 BC. Recent findings, discovered approximately one year ago during the construction of the SNFCC — 80 ancient bodies discovered with their arms shackled above their heads, pointing to a violent death and believed to be captured for being followers of Cylon during the 7th century BC—were reported among the most significant archaeological discoveries of the past year, worldwide. With regards to this discovery, our Foundation is in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, so that we may cover all costs for the construction of the relevant museum space. In the 19th century, the surrounding area was called “voidolivado” (cattle pasture), since cattle would graze here, among the moors of the Faliron Delta. Which takes us to the 20th century and the famous racing track, open from 1925 to 2003 and then...

Then... our Foundation, bequeathed by my uncle, the late Stavros Niarchos, in 1996, was also born in the same year and started its activities around the world in general and, of course, in Greece in particular. At this point I would like to extend a huge “thank you” to our founder, Stavros Niarchos. If it wasn't for him, neither our Foundation nor the Cultural Center would exist today. Among its many philanthropic activities, our Foundation began discussing a “large” independent project that would be a gift to the Greek society. In a very short period of time, the idea for the SNFCC was born. In 2007, we signed the Preliminary Agreement and, in 2009, the agreement for the construction of the SNFCC was ratified by the Greek Parliament. Just before the space was turned into a construction site, we held a presentation of the project by architect Renzo Piano, in the area where the Agora is located today.

Construction works for the SNFCC began in 2012. Internally we had named it the “triple” project since, apart from the new premises of the National Library (almost exactly 114 years after the decision of February 26, 1903 concerning the delivery of the Vallianeios Library construction to the Greek State—the magnificent neoclassical Hansen and Ziller building on Panepistimiou Street) and the Greek National Opera, it also included a park, the Stavros Niarchos Park, covering an area of almost 200 acres; a park that, with regards to the Cultural Center, is almost as important as the two institutions-pillars of our culture.

And now, 10 years after the Preliminary Agreement, 5 years after the commencement of the construction, the SNFCC is delivered, in its entirety, to the Greek State. As of today, IT'S YOURS!

The SNFCC, with a total budget of €620 million, is delivered fully equipped, fully paid, and already full of thousands of memories... We are delivering a SNFCC built to the highest quality, environmental and operational standards. We are delivering it to you with the commitment that, as long as the SNFCC is “run” properly, we will continue to assist and support it financially, with a grant totaling €50 million for the next 5

years: €25 million for programming, all the while remaining active participants (independently of the programming by the National Library and the National Opera), and €25 million to cover operating expenses. Also, our Foundation has given a grant of €5 million to each of the two institutions (NLG, GNO) for their smooth transition to the SNFCC. Let me remind you at this point that the National Library of Greece continues to operate under the Ministry of Education and the Greek National Opera under the Ministry of Culture, while the entire Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center will fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Finance, which will act as the Center's institutional owner, always on behalf of its actual owner, the Greek society.

From the first moment of its conception, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center has shined like a bright star. This did not happen by accident, but because of hard work, excellent & continuous collaborations at all levels, a shared vision and a common goal. All the above resulted in a beautiful creation that was built here, on the deserted space of the Faliron Delta. We wish to thank our many colleagues and associates, who shared our vision and took this "journey to Ithaka" with us... the amazing man, architect and loyal friend of Greece, Renzo Piano and his associates inside and outside Greece (Betaplan), the joint construction venture Impregilo-TERNA, the Park's architects, Deborah Nevins and our "own" Eleni Pangalou, our associates and project managers Faithful and Gould, our team from the Foundation, guided by the amazing Theodore Maravelias, the Cultural Center staffing team, lead initially by Ioannis Trohopoulos and then by Dimitris Protopsaltou, the hundreds of workers who worked tirelessly on site over these past 5 years, and so many others... a huge THANK YOU! AT THIS POINT I WOULD LIKE TO ASK THE SNFCC TEAM TO PLEASE STAND UP SO THAT THEY MAY BE RECOGNIZED AND SO THAT WE MAY THANK THEM FOR ALL THE WONDERFUL MOMENTS THEY HAVE GIVEN US TO DATE.

And, an even bigger "thank you" to all my colleagues, associates and friends at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, my second family. It is a place and a way of life. ALL OF YOU WORKING AT THE STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION, PLEASE STAND UP. THANK YOU!

And now to address the concerns... the following are just some of the messages we have received via email and social media recently, and I quote:

---the beginning of the end,

---the time we all feared is now upon us,

---I'll take a pic, to remember the before and after,

---and now, the decline begins,

---...it really pains me that the project is delivered to the Greek State. I have no confidence and no hopes that the Greek government can manage the SNFCC properly,

---I was wondering... Does the Board of the Foundation realize that anything which crosses the hands of the Greek State ends up being destroyed?... Why leave this jewel of Athens in their hands? In my opinion, it would be best if the Cultural Center was not delivered to the Greek State, so that it doesn't end up as an abandoned, unkempt building. Please, even though I am just 15 years old, take my email under consideration.

And, a last one:

---Why are you doing this, good people? Is this your first time in Greece?

To this last question, let me just say that Stavros Niarchos came to Greece in 1956 and, by signing a contract with the Greek Government, started one of the largest shipbuilding facilities in Europe, the Hellenic Shipyards, that employed more than 5,000 workers. In 1985, almost 30 years later, they were nationalized, and most of us know what happened... Yes, we've been in Greece, but we choose to BELIEVE!

Most concerns are quite reasonable and it is good to have concerns. Only, sometimes, concerns can function as an excuse for “paralysis” and feverish rants. Perhaps, what would help is a reading from the poem “Waiting for the Barbarians” by Constantine P. Cavafy, which ends with this verse:

“Because night has fallen and the barbarians have not come.
And some who have just returned from the border say
there are no barbarians any longer.
And now, what’s going to happen to us without barbarians?
They were, those people, a kind of solution.”

Leonard Cohen, a friend and regular visitor of our country, passed away recently. In his songs, he had talked about the “crack” that exists in everything and through which the light gets in. This is also the case for the shining star that is the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center. It does not need to shine even brighter within the darkness of despair; it only needs to function as a “crack”, through which the light of hope gets in, for a better and more creative tomorrow.

Officially, the Cultural Center is owned by the government, but its true owners are all Citizens. Let us remember President Obama’s words on this very stage approximately 3.5 months ago, when he said:

“Most of all, we’re indebted to Greece for the most precious of gifts, the truth, the understanding that as individuals of free will, we have the right and the capacity to govern ourselves. For it was here, 25 centuries ago, in the rocky hills of this city, that a new idea emerged: Demokratia (Democracy) and Kratos (the power), the right to rule, comes from demos, the people. The notion that we are citizens; not servants, but stewards of our society. The concept of citizenship: that we have both rights and responsibilities. These are all concepts that grew out of this rocky soil.”

He then mentioned, and I quote:

“I am certain that if you persevere in your efforts, no matter how difficult the challenge may be, Greece will live to see better days. Because, this wonderful Hall and the Center—a symbol of Greece’s culture and resilience—remind us that, just as your strength and determination have enabled you to overcome great adversity in the course of your history, there is nothing that can demoralize the Greek people.”

WE BELIEVE. We believe because we won this wager. The Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center was embraced warmly by everyday people. Indicatively, I will just mention that since the events of last June and, later, when we opened the Center for the 15th of August, approximately 760,000 visitors have attended the SNFCC, around 25,000 on average each week, exceeding all reasonable expectations, even though there is still no public transport connection to the Cultural Center. Already, the Center has almost 50,000 registered members. Present and future governments, in the decades to come, can continue in this way to “win the wager”, by overcoming any partisan, political and private interests with the aim of preserving the project for the good of the Greek people.

If we all put on—granted it is perhaps hard for all of us to fit in the same size, but not impossible—the historic blue & white jersey of the Greek National Team, dreams can come true. And, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center can be an example of cooperation and efficiency for the entire country, as long as all of us believe in it. WE BELIEVE, because in the 70 Assemblies of Government Committees in which we have participated during the past 8 years, alongside the local administration of the Municipality of Kallithea and representatives of the National Library and the National Opera, during the project’s construction (indeed, the 70th Assembly took place today at noon), and representatives from the relevant ministries of 8 different Administrations, there has been excellent cooperation in all areas. If you share a common vision, then everything is possible.

Today, there are many who speak of projects created through partnerships between the public and private sectors. The Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center is one of the world's finest examples of such a project. We wish to thank all the Prime Ministers and the Administrations for their excellent cooperation over the years. Specifically, I wish to thank the Prime Minister and his associates for their impeccable cooperation over the last few months during the project's final delivery stages. WE BELIEVE, because, when there are proper partnerships in place, with common goals and without hidden agendas, dreams can come true. But, I also have a concern of my own... Perhaps, more like a secret dream of mine... All of us who worked for this dream which is now a reality, hope that the Cultural Center will continue to operate in the manner it has operated hitherto, with a similar attitude and similar goals. The Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center can be an example of how the entire country can move forward... and not the opposite.

In our Foundation, we will continue our journey to Ithaka... the SNF will continue to give; wherever it can and to the fullest extent of its capabilities. From 1996 until today, after 20 years of actions, we have already made grant commitments of over 2 billion dollars in 111 nations. In Greece, we have helped with grants totaling more than 1.1 billion euros. And we continue... We are close to announcing our grant to the National Emergency Center (EKAV) for the upgrading of its Athens operational center, the procurement of 143 new ambulances, i.e. 22% of the total fleet, which will be available in all regions of the country and the Aegean and Ionian islands, as well as to cover the entire expenses for the full maintenance of ambulances for 8 years, which is their average lifespan.

In conclusion, I would like to extend a big "thank you" to our dearly departed friend, Tzanetos Antypas, who left us way too early a few days ago, for everything he managed to accomplish in his life for his fellowmen... Tzaneto, farewell... And, on a lighter note, we would like to wish good luck to Daphne Mantziaraki and Kyriakos Papadopoulos at the Oscars on Sunday, representing the best qualities of the Greek spirit through the documentary *4.1 miles*.

And we continue... WE BELIEVE... and, with all our heart, filled with love and hope, WE DELIVER TO YOU the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center.

Thank you