

**Opening Address of the Chairwoman of the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural
Foundation,
Sophia Staïkou, at the Acropolis Museum**

Your Excellency Mr President,

I thank you for the great honour you are doing us by being present here, today, at the International Meeting on Cultural Landscapes.

With today's occasion, though, I would also like to thank you from the depths of my heart for the discreet and continuous support you have offered us over all these years for each of our Cultural Foundation's initiatives, as you have done and continue to do tirelessly for all the cultural activities of our country. It is, for us, a special reward. Yet another encouragement for our work...

Messrs Ministers
Mrs Commissioner
Esteemed conference participants

We welcome you to this Meeting, whose focal point is our contribution to a new, integrated policy concerning culture and the environment.

It is a great satisfaction to have you here with us today, eminent scientists and distinguished personalities, from Greece and abroad, for a cause that is truly interwoven with the values, but also the perspective, of Europe.

A unified Europe, with common and integrated policies to address old and new challenges, as is also the management of the cultural and natural heritage of our peoples.

The weight of your participation, moreover, is what also proves the importance of this International Meeting, which has been organized by the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation, in collaboration with the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports and that of the Environment, Energy and Climate Change, in the resplendent premises of the Acropolis Museum where we are hosted today.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

There corresponds to each and every one of us a portion of contribution to the public arena and a portion of responsibility for the future. For the system of values and the quality of life we shall bequeath to the younger generations.

Culture is the force that organizes and furthers human behaviours. It is a mobilizing force for better personal and collective achievements. Culture is more than just a constituent of evolution. It is the force that turns the wheel of evolution, as we all well know. And this reality is not uninfluenced by the natural environment, which reflects and completes evolution. Because the natural environment is the space that cultivates

self-knowledge and moderation; that delimits - but also supports - the development of our economic and social action.

Culture and the environment are, simultaneously, the parameters nobody can ignore today when talking of, and searching for, a new model of balanced and sustainable development. A better perspective for our societies, on a worldwide scale.

At an economically very unstable and politically very uncertain time, both within and outside Europe's borders, when battles or even wars are waged because of colossal interests, the defence and management of our cultural and natural heritage constitutes a very strong value for our society and the societies of Europe.

It constitutes yet another challenge, so that common policies might be forged as a further contribution to European unification. And it constitutes, too, yet another tool towards developing new supranational institutions, seams of stability and cohesion in the European space.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The organization of this International Meeting has, for all of us at the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation, a double significance.

It seals, on the one hand, the «*closing*» of a riveting decade, during which we did not simply believe that a financial institution, the Piraeus Bank, must run and support a Foundation dedicated to culture, but we also dared to shape a new model of cultural creation, which is based on the synergy of the public and the private sectors.

We tried out this model, in collaboration with the Greek State and essentially the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, with great success and today we run seven - soon to become nine - Museums in the Greek provinces, which welcome over 120,000 visitors per year.

Our Museums preserve local history, in the manner in which this relies on and ties in with the exploitation of natural resources: olive oil, water, marble, silk, and others; they present in relief the productive history of our land and function as everyday spaces of cultural creation in the towns where they are hosted.

Please allow me to remark that the culture produced on a local scale, that is to say close to the citizen, is as important as the culture of large halls. And if the latter may relate to a brilliant theatrical performance or a breathtaking evening of ballet, the former, that is to say the one of a local scale, presents the advantage of creating enclaves of culture in local societies, while in parallel also reinforcing their cohesion.

We saw these enclaves take shape through the functioning of our Museums and, with the passage of time, acquire a discernible mark locally and regionally and reinforce their imprint. We saw local societies that were initially hesitant about our Museums, but which today are proud of them.

The organization of this International Meeting also has a second significance. It signals a new cycle for the Foundation, a new enthralling route, which we shall cover with greater experience and with an even greater disposition towards contribution.

Our new initiatives touching upon the natural and cultural environment also encompass this two-day International Meeting, whose objective is to investigate and document the cultural landscape to a fuller extent, and by this I mean the landscape that records the interaction of humankind and nature, with culture as a vehicle.

Out of the interesting speeches I am sure will be heard and the fertile discussions that will follow, issues will arise and priorities will be set that will define the main principles of a new methodical and structured policy.

A policy, which will link culture to the environment through deeds and, in particular, serve to preserve, highlight and manage the cultural landscapes in Natura sites. A new network, a new cultural route that will cross through all the countries of Europe and many of the countries of the world.

I profoundly believe that this is the role of a modern Foundation. To lay claim to new knowledge, to innovate, to make the most of technology, but mainly to promote the common good, to converse with society, to contribute to social cohesion.

Besides, as French author and politician André Malraux said, culture is not inherited, but conquered...

This is what we have tried and what we are still striving to do at the Cultural Foundation, with the valuable assistance always of the Piraeus Bank Group, which covers the Foundation's operating expenses and, naturally, of its Museum Network one hundred percent.

May I point out, too, that it is not fortuitous that this policy of ours has won us a series of awards and distinctions from the European and international community.

And this policy of ours contributed to the inclusion of the Piraeus Bank Group in the internationally recognized Dow Jones Sustainability Index Emerging Markets.

Contrary to what most believe, the index in question does not solely concern economic data, but also examines if and to what degree an entity invests in culture, the protection of the environment and social cohesion.

Undoubtedly, we cannot achieve this on our own. Your presence at today's International Meeting means, to my understanding, that the auditorium is full of valuable allies.

Your Excellency, I thank you particularly once again.
I thank the speakers for their response to the invitation we addressed to them.

I thank all of you profoundly for being here today.