

Dear young entrepreneurs and guests,

dear Greeks and Croats,

let me start by saying that of all the persons sitting in this room I might possibly be the least qualified to talk about cultural entrepreneurship. So, I perceive my role here tonight more to listen to what you have to say on the topic than to tell you what we could do. In this sense I just want to make a few introductory remarks which are hopefully going to outline a kind of general framework for our later discussions.

I would first like to say something about the Greek-Croatian cultural cooperation. It is not from yesterday, it started thousands of years ago and there has been a long history to it. Ancient Greeks have colonized some of Croatian islands and littoral and there are many findings and toponyms testifying to that. Again, just last week we had here in Athens a very interesting lecture on this topic delivered by a young scientist from the Croatian Institute of archaeology. It has been recorded that colonizers from the island Paros colonized our island Hvar in the fifth century B. C. and gave it a name Faros. Some time ago the homage to this has been paid by the Croatian side by organizing a kind of „return trip“ so a team led by a scientist sailed on a ship all the way from Hvar to Paros and there are plans to organize in summer next year the scientific conference on Paros on this topic. Suffice to say here that one of the seven sites Croatia has inscribed on the UNESCO's list of the world cultural heritage is the land parcelization on our island Hvar, so called „Faros hora“, which is after all this time still in excellent condition serving to its primary purpose, that is to agrocultural production.

Cultural cooperation between our countries didn't of course stopped in ancient times, it has continued all the way until today. It would take too much of our time here to mention all the forms of it but there are many.

There are broad perspectives for the cultural relations and we have to make use of them. Allow me to mention just a few examples. Some twenty years ago the ancient Greek statue of Apoxyomenos has been found in the Croatian sea and I would like very much that this statue make its temporary „home voyage“ and is one day exhibited here. We tried to organize it in cooperation with the world famous Archaeological museum here in Athens, so far we failed to do so but eventually we still might still be able to do it one day. Another project I would like to see realized one day here in Athens is the exhibition of the Museum of broken relationships. This museum exists in Zagreb, and is to my mind actually one of the most impressive examples of the cultural entrepreneurship, is exhibiting various remains from the past love affairs donated by former lovers and has its firm place on the list of the world's most interesting museums and has been awarded as the most innovative museum in Europe in 2011. The interest has been expressed in Greece to have it here and let's hope one day we could organize it.

I believe that the potential for culture is all around us and everywhere, it only takes our sensitivity, innovation and creativity to recognize it and fully realize. Objective reality and people's imagination thus mix up and form new exciting experiences. It is here where I see the starting point for cultural entrepreneurship, although sometimes even the term is not so clear.

Let me mention one example about which I learned during the conference CreativeMed which was held here in Athens just last week. There is a community Prato close to Firenze in Italy with the rich heritage of the textile industry which used to be very developed there in the industrial era. They have been thinking how to preserve this heritage and have developed a project to do it. They have collected thousands of various textile designs from that era, put them on display and invited young people to draw their inspiration upon them and create their own models in the same tradition. Later a show and a competition was organized on that basis and the most successful models found their way into production. I would say that this example shows that by the entrepreneurial approach in the field of culture we can successfully give new life to objects and ideas belonging to modernity by putting them in a postmodern highlight. To this end we can say that culture is definitely an important aspect of society but also potential for economy. By combining culture with business cultural entrepreneurship is a win win project. That means that cultural services and products could both give sustainability to cultural entrepreneurs (artists, architects, organizations etc..) and preserve cultural heritage and have a social impact.

Now, what is really the role of the Embassy in the whole picture? Not the most important one but not negligible either, that would be my shortest reply. The main role goes to you, young entrepreneurs, and ours is to support you. Until a few years ago there was a cultural officer at this Embassy dealing with promotion of relations between the two countries in this field, organization of various cultural events and so on but this post has been abolished. It seems that the era in which the state was the main organizer of cultural events has gone and we have to look for new mechanisms. The state is not completely out but its role is only a supportive one. Just a few days from today there will be a big event devoted to entrepreneurship DisruptStartupScaleUp here in Athens with envisaged participation of thousands of people and I don't doubt at all that the field of culture will be left out. Allow me to as well mention here that we have a institution called „Croatia house“, promoting the Croatian cultural projects abroad and we stand ready to assist you in getting its support if you come up with interesting projects.

To conclude, the basic tool we have in the future to promote these relations between the two countries is to rely on you, young people with great ideas and support you in their implementation. With my team here at the Croatian embassy I stay at your disposal. Together we can do things, this is my firm belief. To this end I came here, as I said, to learn from you how we can do it together.

I wish you all luck in your discussions here tonight. And, of course, many accomplished projects in the future!

Thank you very much.