

REPORT FROM MEETINGS IN NEW YORK AND
WASHINGTON D.C. WITH THE TEAM OF
Repo(we)rGreece

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OBJECTIVE – KEY CONTACTS

Repo(we)rGreece is a grassroots collective initiative that seeks to redefine the image of Greece and assist in the effort to reclaim the country's international role and influence, based not on the failures or the interests of the few, but rather on the strengths, talents, and achievements of the many.

By underlining and exploring the result-oriented perceptions that are reflected in the Repower success stories, thoughts, and opinions, the initiative endeavors to showcase a side of Greece that will effectively reestablish its credibility and confront misperceptions within the international community while, at the same time, revitalizing the Greek morale.

Repo(we)rGreece engages the country's sectors of strategic interest - specifically Education, Culture, Innovation, Entrepreneurship, Agribusiness, Tourism, Energy, and Shipping - in an effort to draw attention to the individuals and businesses who collaborate, create, and forge solutions in the face of overwhelming hardship.

In order to confront prevailing negative stereotypes within the international realm, the Greek people must first reestablish their credibility and institute new channels of communication with strategic key audiences. With this game plan in mind, we organized a road show in New York and Washington, DC. Our aim was firstly to better comprehend the thoughts and opinions related to our country that are prevalent abroad, and then to inform the Greek-American community, academic representatives, and the media, of Repo(we)rGreece's goals and progress thus far.

We appreciate that our initiative requires time, understanding, and a spirit of collectivity in order to succeed. In implementing our campaign, we chose to begin with the United States in the hopes that important collaborations of various natures could be fostered, thus making an example for other countries to follow.

We had the opportunity to meet and discuss with friends, colleagues and supporters from the Repo(we)r Greece New York Committee, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, the Executive Office of the President, the State Department, Woodrow Wilson Center, RAND Corporation, IESC, the Center for Hellenic Studies at Harvard University, George Washington University, the Next Generation Initiative, the Embassy of Greece in Washington, AHEPA, the Smithsonian Institution as well as communication and PR firms and Media representatives.

KEY POINTS

The creation of a volunteer-based collective grassroots campaign that incorporates communication and public diplomacy tools appears somewhat ambitious in a period not only of profound disappointment and apathy within Greece, but also of the country's severe credibility downgrade in the eyes of the international community.

Our Repo(we)r team was well-aware of what we would have to face, both within our borders and abroad. Since the beginning, we have understood that redefining the way Greece is perceived by friends, allies, the Diaspora, and even by the most skeptical individuals, must not involve a superficial "re-packaging," or changing of mottos, but rather a concrete and accurate representation of the perceptions, practices, and mentalities that will benefit Greece. We understood that we needed tailor-made messages for each target audience and field of interest. Similarly, we were aware that Repo(we)rGreece - like any other significant effort - would suffer from the lack of political courage and skills in the Greek political spectrum, thereby exacerbating the obstacles we would come to face.

As the discussions we held in the States confirmed, our efforts could have been a lot easier, had the political leadership proven bold and determined to face its own mistakes and inefficiencies that for more than 30 years have been leading to today's multilayered challenges.

Likewise, our discussions revealed that Greece's lack of transparency, accountability, and an effective system of justice, as well as our inability to create and apply a modern, stable, and lucid legal framework for entrepreneurship, have together crushed our credibility. Moreover, these shortcomings have substantially reduced the value of Greece at the geo-political, geo-economic and geo-strategic level.

However, at the same time, it became evident that we do not have the luxury to wait.

We firmly believe - and were pleased to find that our interlocutors agreed - that healthy forces in all fields of society do exist in Greece. Such forces work diligently and honestly to create, innovate, collaborate, and move beyond the obstacles of the crisis. We must keep these healthy forces from being absorbed by the negative climate, allowing them to move forward and thrive. In light of such perseverance and success, perhaps the skeptics will reconsider.

Our meetings in New York and Washington aimed mainly at explaining our initiative and listening to views and opinions - no matter how harsh they were - and then lay the foundations of our strategy concretely.

It is clear that the key recurring point was Greece's lack of credibility. More specifically, we received the following key-messages:

- The image of Greece that prevails in the US is not determined in any way by the Greek people themselves, but by the ongoing mistakes and poor choices of the Greek governments and the majority of politicians, regardless of which party they might serve.
- There is harsh, but well-founded criticism of the Greek people with regards to how they allowed inefficiency and political, administrative, and social impunity to reach such magnitude.

- It is strongly believed that the crisis of values and institutions is much more severe than the economic crisis, while the permanent lack of self-criticism leads to the preservation of the problem and finally to the isolation of the country from people who want to offer their support.
- Everyone - without exception - stressed the issues of tax evasion, corruption, the immunity of politicians, the lack of transparency, anomy, and the lack of any feasible entrepreneurial/investment/taxation model for growth. Even so, everyone agreed that all of the aforementioned issues were not related only to the global or the Greek economic crisis and that they have deeper roots.
- From meeting to meeting, there was the shared idea that no one is really preoccupied by the past but rather by how we will move forward with our gaze fixed on a successful future. The only way to reverse Greece's negative image is through tangible and long-term results. We must steer clear of not only the stagnancy and inefficiency, but also the grandiose unrealistic plans that characterize our recent history.
- Everyone unanimously agreed that Greece should define a clear, powerful, and solid message that would acknowledge what is happening, accepting our erroneous choices and leaving behind those who have failed. But most importantly, our message must include a road map that will guide us through the austerity and produce results. Again and again, we were told, *"no more apologies; we want results."*
- Equally, all those that we met with stressed first that we as Greeks are not aware of our position in the international agenda, and then that beyond the undeniable historical value and importance of Greece, the future should be molded according to the skills, choices, and achievements that exist today. *"We can admire and honor Greece for what it used to be, but we want to support it for what it can become,"* we were told.
- We were amazed by the misinformation, or the lack of spherical information, regarding the situation unfolding in Greece as of the present. Apart from the fact that the only messages conveyed through the media are negative, we came to see that the negative stories were blown out of proportion in order to become more appealing to readers - whether they concerned the violence of the riots, the unionists damaging the tourism industry and the economy, or the living conditions and restraints of our fellow citizens.
- Furthermore, the absence of coordination in managing our communication crisis has allowed the creation of wrong messages that either reflect misinformation or lack of sufficient knowledge and experience, or unfortunately and at most times, personal agendas of self promotion.

- Finally, we should highlight that each and every one of our meetings raised the issue of the younger generation, suggesting that it is imperative to guide them towards collectiveness, collaboration, and engagement.

In light of the above, it is clear that the microcosm of our country and the fake reality in which we have been living in - fooling only ourselves - has no power beyond our borders, while the convenient perception “this is Greece, what can we do...” simply no longer has any relevance.

It is equally evident that businessmen, academics, young successful Diaspora members of 3rd or 4th generation are not willing to “invest” in our country if we do not implement structural and systemic changes. This is not to say that they do not love Greece or that they have lost faith in us. After all, this is shown in the number and high-end level of the meetings we held throughout this road show, and in the next steps of the Repo(we)rGreece campaign that were discussed with and agreed upon by leading organizations of the United States (i.e. the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, Harvard University, George Washington University, Woodrow Wilson Center, AHEPA, etc).

However, since there is more to life than uploading motivating and inspiring mottos onto our social media or continuously crying over spilled milk, we in Repo(we)rGreece all believe that we should move forward to the next step, the one of collaboration, action, and creation.

The re-establishment of the credibility of Greece - a prerequisite for the international community to accept any image of Greece that we might want to portray - can be achieved only through actions and stories that reflect the achievements, skills, and talents of the many, rather than the failures and interests of the few.

And this is why we are committed in moving on ...

Alexandros Costopoulos