

KEY POINTS FROM THE ACADEMIC DISCUSSION SERIES IN THE UNITED STATES

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY | VIRGINIA TECH (GRADUATE CENTER) | HARVARD UNIVERSITY | MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (MIT) | BOSTON UNIVERSITY | HELLENIC COLLEGE HOLY CROSS (HCHC) | BOSTON COLLEGE | NEW YORK UNIVERSITY | CITY COLLEGE OF NEW YORK- CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK | COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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Restoring the credibility of Greece - a prerequisite for the international community to accept any image or listen to any message that we want to convey - can only be achieved through actions and stories that reflect the achievements, skills, and talents of the many, rather than the failures and interests of the few.

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THE ACADEMIC DISCUSSION SERIES WAS ORGANIZED WITH THE KIND SUPPORT OF THE COMPANIES



INTRODUCTION

The failure of the solutions that were imposed, the size of the ongoing structural changes that are yet to be completed and the fact that in reality, we are confronted with a monumental societal crisis regarding our perceptions and values, render the existence of a collective public diplomacy initiative imperative.

We have embarked on a journey that began almost two years ago, through which we are still determined to utilize and combine our expertise, experiences, applied and tested practices, our broad and esteemed networks, our talents and ideas.

It is our strong belief that our country will not be saved by a great political leader or a worthy initiative; if there is a chance of building through this crisis a more just, secure and viable future for our children, this will only happen if WE collaborate, unite forces, listen, discuss and finally create prospects and forge solutions.

REPOWERGREECE

The objective of RepowerGreece after 18 months was and still is extremely simple, with however strategic importance for the future of our country. To portray any image, to attract any foreign investments, to invite tourists, to export our goods or to build and sustain any bilateral relations, we need to reconnect with our friends and allies, re-introduce ourselves and finally restore the credibility of our country.

To do so, we believe that it is imperative to redefine Greece based on the creativity, persistence and talent of the majority of her people and not the failures, incompetence or special interests of the few.

Within the team of Repower, we knew since the beginning what challenges we would be facing both within and outside our borders. We knew that the task of redefining Greece as it is perceived by our friends, allies, the diaspora or even our harsh critics, could not be merely based on a superficial change of mottos or “packaging”, but it would consist of an ongoing effort which should be based on justified examples and practices reflecting different perceptions, practices and mindsets.

We knew that we would need tailor-made messages for each special target audience. We chose to focus on two fields:

- Academic institutions in countries of strategic interest for Greece, since the students of today will be tomorrow’s decision-makers and their perceptions are fresh, creative and constructive.
- Think-tanks in countries of strategic interest for Greece, where policies are shaped and opinions are formed on national and international levels.

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In light of the above and of our profound belief that a different communication approach is needed, we organized an academic discussion series in 14 universities of the United States including Harvard, MIT and Columbia. In holding these academic discussion events, our aim was to listen and exchange ideas and thoughts through a constructive dialogue, and inform participants of the constructive, result-oriented forces that are shaping positive change here in Greece in an effort to ultimately restore our credibility within an audience of critical importance.

During these events, we chose not to give a one-dimensional lecture on the problems we are called to face today or what went wrong. These are over-examined and analyzed issues, and there is no point in constantly underlining the problems of our country.

On the contrary, students and teachers were invited to provide specific proposals on how to move forward based on their personal knowledge and experience, either in the form of a presentation (8 in each event), or through roundtable discussions.

The proposals offered practical and realistic solutions, based on optimizing the benefits deriving from our country's best features. What was proven was that there is a strong interest for our country and not just a superficial one, as it was reflected through a substantial will to participate in a broader effort to create prospects, an effort which required research, preparation and collaboration between teams of either students or teachers.

KEY POINTS

From the roundtable discussions and the events that were planned, the following remarks are worth noting:

- **LACK OF INFORMATION** | Misinformation and lack of spherical information is still evident, regarding the real situation in our country. This concerns institutions, organizations, media as well as Americans of Greek origin who should theoretically have better access to the actual developments and the current state of affairs in Greece.

Besides the fact that the only messages reflected through the media are negative, at the same time these messages are portrayed out of proportion, especially with regard to the actual size of the crisis' consequences and social reactions. The violence of the demonstrations, the political failures or conflicts, the rise of extremist social groups, the choice of some to damage trade, tourism and the economy through questionable ways of reaction and strikes and the hardships that a large part of our fellow-citizens have to face, are the only powerful messages that traverse the Atlantic.

Additionally, there is an evident lack of information on all the positive developments that are taking place in Greece concerning the structural changes and any achievements in the fight against corruption.

Finally, it seems that there is no adequate information on how the people of Greece move forward, forging prospects and solutions during a time of severe economic recession. Innovative businesses in the ICT sector, an important rise in youth entrepreneurship, agricultural products which are now competitive in world markets, investments in tourism that are practically redefining regional development, civil society initiatives that produce substantial results in social welfare and internationally awarded university students in the R&D field – are only some of the “Repower messages” that we conveyed; but remain however unknown to many.

- **LACK OF DIALOGUE WITH OFFICIALS** | All the participants stressed the fact that there is no bridge of communication and dialogue with government or institutional officials regarding potential support mechanisms, aiding programs or technical support proposals. Obviously this is related to red tape, ignorance or indifference of the public sector -having to cope with its own problems and inefficiencies, as well as to the prevailing feeling of disappointment within the civil servants.

They also highlighted the lack of a mechanism that will be defining priorities, accepting and managing proposals and coordinating their implementation, thus having numerous benefits and putting an end to the indifference or frustration of all those who want to help but do not know how.

- **TOURISM** | As far as tourism is concerned, although everyone recognizes the importance and gravity of the Greek tourism industry, most of the participants referred to the issue of the lack of a stable long-term strategy, capable of responding to new trends and conditions of the world market.

The importance of realistic approaches was underlined, while some very interesting proposals were presented that could effectively contribute to the national economy, such as the program of “one more day” that was referred to by Robert Apfel in Columbia, according to which –besides any effort to attract new markets- we should invest in better utilizing our services in order to keep the visitors that are already in Greece for one more day.

The Thunderbird School of Global Management graduate (which is the #1 university for International Business globally) Maria Alkistis Iliopoulou, suggested an equally interesting plan, whereby through the participation of the citizens and especially the fresh and innovative approaches of the younger generation, we could set up an annual tourism competition between different municipalities or regions. Each one will be choosing a category they want to compete in by focusing on a current or future competitive advantage (e.g. natural beauty, agribusiness, culture, health, gastrotourism...) and they will be focusing on how to appeal to their target group by highlighting and enhancing that advantage, and thus by transforming it to a key element for a memorable and unique tourism experience. Through social media and new communication tools, the tourists’ experiences and preferences will be turned into competition rankings, connecting at the same time each region with the visitors’ communities.

- **INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP** | Another point that was stressed was the need to enhance and support Greek entrepreneurship not only as a solution to the crisis, but also in order to capitalize upon the highly skilled and talented human capital of our country. As it was noted "there is so much technical and innovative know-how that we now have to build the infrastructure to support it and capitalize upon it”.

Furthermore, the importance of fostering innovation was highlighted, referring to the most profitable new technologies and rising entrepreneurial sectors (ICT, applications, etc...) but also to the innovative practices within the primary sector (agribusiness).

- **AGRIBUSINESS** | The turn towards agriculture that is so evident today especially amongst the younger generation was pointed out as one of the positive aspects of the broader crisis, where by capitalizing upon their exceptional studies, talents and skills and applying them to traditional family businesses, young Greeks invest in high-edge technologies and quality in redefining the overall agribusiness industry of our country. However, this positive development is also not communicated thoroughly to the international community.

Another interesting issue that was emphasized was that there is a strong demand in the global market for high quality agricultural products, such as the ones produced in Greece. However, once again there is a lack of the right infrastructure and mindset for their effective promotion in foreign markets, and this could be successfully overcome through the collaboration of private organizations and initiatives and the capitalization of new tools and practices.

The initiative of the American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce stood out as an exceptional example of such collaborations, as well as the initiative by GAEA; both aiming at supporting new efforts by providing their experience, knowledge and funds.

Additionally, interesting proposals were submitted regarding the maximization of the communication outreach and promotion of sales through mechanisms and actions driven by the diaspora or the universities. A group of student from Harvard (Kimon Drakopoulos, Konstantinos Nestoras, Giorgos Papachristoudis, Dimitrios Tzeranis, Spyros Zoumpoulis) suggested the implementation of a long term campaign to raise awareness for Greek products, based on the collaboration of private organizations and initiatives and the use of new technologies and practices (online promotion through various websites, social media, crowdfunding).

- **EDUCATION** | Many of the participants highlighted the prospects of growth and development laying in the educational sector, that could turn Greece into a unique destination for higher education, in contrary to today's inability to attract young students of Greek origin to come to their home country to study, something that would impact positively upon potential future economic and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Professor Nicholas Ashford of MIT suggested that by expanding and internationalizing the university system in Greece, our country could effectively attract foreign students and upgrade the level of higher education into a major profitable sector, as it is for California, Florida, the Netherlands, Australia and the UK. Instead of exporting capital and brainpower abroad, Greece's new and revamped educational institutions could put Greece on the map, helping it attract both human and non-human capital and, along with it, research and development funds and, ultimately, foreign investments in industries that are symbiotic with flourishing seats of learning.

The paradox of our neighboring countries was noted, which attract foreign students based on the low cost of higher education, without having however the cultural background, the human capital or the strong symbolisms of history and civilization that Greece has, which would definitely be an important selection criterion for many people around the world.

▪ HEALTHCARE | A lot of importance was equally given to the sector of healthcare, with the discussions being centered around three main fields:

- i. The prospects to promote Greece as an international destination for healthcare, should we choose to capitalize upon the highly advanced technological infrastructure (resulting from spending enormous amounts of money in new technologies during the previous years), but mainly upon the highly skilled scientific human capital.
- ii. The analysis, evaluation and possible implementation of successful international health programs, such as the Aravind model presented by Harvard student Constantine Tarabanis. According to this model which was first adapted in southern India in 1976, the economically challenged groups of citizens could receive the same high quality medical assistance as the more fortunate ones. This humanitarian initiative could be an inspiration through which we can find practices and solutions to the multitude of problems we are called to face today stemming from the deficits of public healthcare in Greece. During the conversation, the participants highlighted a number of various actions and initiatives that provide significant efforts in this field.

Additionally, the need for the implementation of a council of experts was pointed out, who will be determining the priorities based on their criticality and not personal preference or biased opinion. These priorities could also be taken into account by everyone who is already trying to help through humanitarian / social initiatives or social responsibility programs. As it was also stressed during a roundtable discussion with communication and lobbying firms in Washington DC, “we cannot understand how is it still possible to get sponsors for concerts today, when at the same time such severe problems abound”.

- iii. The need to place higher up in the agenda of the government, of Europe, of our lenders and of the broader society, the rapidly emerging issues of public healthcare, as they are reflected through indexes of international organizations and observers, and as they were also underlined in the presentation of professor Christina Zarcadoolas (PhD- CUNY).

Besides the important facts and statistics that were presented while describing the current problems and the inability to deal with them, what was also pointed out was the lack of bridges of communication between international organizations and groups of scientists, and national players in public healthcare in Greece, as well as the overwhelming bureaucracy.

The dynamic and important role of initiatives/ platforms such as RepowerGreece were recognized, which bring together private and public organizations, universities, NGOs, businesses and citizens in a common effort to find solutions, form collaborations and carry through constructive actions, putting aside the bureaucratic procedures and the inefficiencies of the current system.

Finally, the disappointment was clear regarding the stance of the Troika related international organizations that choose to turn a blind eye towards the great humanitarian issues that are undoubtedly far more critical than the financial problems.

POINTS OF SIGNIFICANT INTEREST

Additionally to the above remarks, from the discussion events and the roundtable discussions that were organized, the following points stand out - that we believe to be of significant importance:

- It is necessary to reassess and redefine our implemented strategy regarding the critical asset of our **CULTURAL HERITAGE**, in light of modern trends in order to be competitive with countries of equal cultural importance, by adapting new technologies and capitalizing upon the heavy influence that Greek civilization has on people all over the world.

Additionally, we need to re-envision Greece's international position in the midst of the current shifts in the Mediterranean region, which present a unique opportunity for our country to reposition itself based on its cultural and geopolitical role, and establish renewed cultural partnerships and exchanges through the use of public diplomacy.

- Furthermore, we need to utilize practices within the "**DIPLOMACY OF SCIENCE**", and the fact that the human capital of the scientific sector of our country has a leading role in every corner of the globe. Academics from all science disciplines underlined that Greece is present everyday wherever knowledge is produced, developments are shaped and historical or philosophical truths are explored. At the same time, professors and student teams of scientific research from various Greek universities lead on the world stage. These two elements can have a critical impact in an effort to redefine our country within the international community, and we can no longer let them unexploited.

- We need to safeguard in every way the main asset of our country which -as everyone agrees- is our **HUMAN CAPITAL** – whether they are highly skilled scientists, healthcare executives, new technologies experts, executives from any professional sector, or university students. The real gold mine of Greece is in its people's intellect, and we should heavily invest in the human capital in order to put our country back on the track of growth and prosperity. It was interestingly noted how paradoxical is the fact that so many Greeks abroad excel in their fields and are renowned for their entrepreneurial, innovative and creative spirit; while in Greece these skills cannot be deployed due to the lack of infrastructure, a mentality that praises minimum effort, the obsolete perceptions rooted in another era and the fact that mediocrity is rewarded instead of excellence.

- Finally, we need to redefine and solidify our relation with the **GREEK DIASPORA**, that will enable us to capitalize on any proposed assistance or programs regarding humanitarian aid, economic development, investments, experiences, knowledge and networks. The importance of the philhellenes was equally highlighted, and the role that they can have in creating prospects and forging solutions. Many proposals were presented which were simple, direct and effective and can contribute in creating a long-term mechanism focused on moving forward through substantial actions and not relying on obsolete perceptions and personal interests.

CONCLUDING POINTS

The following conclusions are drawn from the above remarks:

— We need to find a new and more effective way to communicate with the international community (diaspora, friends, critics) and this task should not be assigned to some “expert” or “friend”. We ought to leave behind us practices and interests of the past and establish a task force comprised by volunteers from the communication sphere and specialized in the targeted countries of interest.

— Even though it seems that Greece is only portrayed through harsh images of violence or people suffering, there is a very strong interest by the international community in our efforts to move forward. At the same time, there is undoubtedly a strong will for substantial support as it is reflected through proposals and actions, that we have to finally capitalize upon and not ignore.

One of our most important advantages -besides the fact that there are so many people determined to move on despite the current difficulties- is the large network of friends that we have and that are standing by us. We do not have the luxury to lose any of these two advantages.

— The discussions confirmed the strong skepticism that abounds regarding the political environment, our “leaders” and their actual ability to make decisions based on common sense, respecting the dignity of citizens and leaving behind failures and mistakes of the past, as well as their one-dimensional blind obedience to our leaders’ terms or their political party’s agendas.

A student from NYU wondered how can we still put up with a vitriolic and abstract rhetoric, instead of demanding tangible proposals and measurable facts which will allow the electorate body to rightfully and justifiably exercise its democratic right.

— Similarly, many questions were raised regarding the efficiency of our judiciary system and the rule of law, as well as our inability to implement a modern and clear legal framework for entrepreneurship and taxation.

— In relation to the roadshow we had organized on March 2012, meeting with think tanks and universities in Washington and New York, we note the following:

- The climate and mood has certainly shifted from seeking responsibility and punishment for those who failed us, to messages of solutions and prospects. We believe that the disappointment and anger of many friends of Greece are progressively being replaced by a clear will to help or at least to focus on those who move on and their “roadmap” of action.
- Similarly, most of the participants stressed that we must keep on focusing on the healthy and creative forces of our society in order to build a better future, as they are conveyed in the Repower Stories; a future that should be reflecting the skills, talents and achievements of today besides the historical and cultural magnitude of Greece’s past -- *“we can admire and honor Greece for its past, but we will support it for what it can become”* as we were told.

- Finally, it was clear from the presentations and discussions that the fixation of a large part of the political, union and media leaders with issues and concerns belonging to the past, turn away from Greece organizations, entrepreneurs, academics, successful members of the Greek diaspora of 3rd or 4th generation, and mostly the younger generation of tomorrow's leaders.
- As young students mentioned "We all have our own problems, and we all are some way or the other bankrupt, either we live in California, Cairo or Barcelona. If the Greek people are not willing to make structural changes that will determine their future, how will we help them?"

THE NEXT STEPS

Almost two years have passed since we started designing and implementing RepowerGreece, and it is clear from our "journey" that a public diplomacy campaign highlighting stories and facts justifying that Greece moves forward, and conveying these messages through discussions in international academic institutions, think tanks and media, is a very valuable tool for the ambitious project to restore the credibility of our country and confront the negative stereotypes. It is equally evident that it is a platform for discussion, analysis, synthesis and finally collaboration, bringing together businesses, public and private organizations, NGOs and critically thinking citizens, to raise the level of public debate and turn ideas into actions through new tools and practices, in order to create solutions TOGETHER for the current challenges we are called to face.

This ability to unite our talents, correct our mistakes and move forward with a renewed and result-oriented mindset, is the most powerful tool to redefine Greece in the perception of the international community.

The international community is seeking for a new framework in order to get involved with Greece, whether regarding the decision and policy-making centers, or the large community of philhellenes and the diaspora.

Our country has a historical role, value and symbolism for the international community. We believe that through realistic and tangible practices which will move past our glorious past and will capitalize on our ability to create prospects and forge solutions, we will be able to move forward together in light of the immense rising challenges.

It is our conviction that the true opportunity that lies within the crisis is to rebuild our country upon a new system of values and priorities, to unite our society setting aside self-centered interests and to shape a future with dignity, opportunities and a profound engagement towards collective well-being and broadly shared prosperity.

With this goal, we continue our effort.

Alexandros Costopoulos

The following speakers participated in the academic discussion series:

- *Dr. Michael G. Jacobides, Sir Donald Gordon Chair of Entrepreneurship and Innovation London Business School*
- *Dr. Nicholas Ashford, MIT faculty-professor*
- *Robert Apfel, President of Bondholder Group*
- *Maurizio Trevisan, CCNY Provost*
- *Christina Zarcadoolas, PhD- CUNY*
- *Jack Karavanos, PhD- CUNY*
- *Angelo Lampousis, PhD CCNY*
- *Nicolas Prevelakis, lecturer on Social Studies at Harvard University*
- *Dr. Aktina Stathaki, founder of Between the Seas Festival of Mediterranean Arts in NYC*
- *Dr. Zoe A. Pappas, Independent Scholar, Columbia University,*
- *Dr. Marcie Boucouvalas, Virginia Tech Professor, Program Director, Fulbright scholar*
- *Dr. Maria- Alkistis Iliopoulou*
- *Dr. Zoe Kosmidou, Cultural Counselor at the Greek Embassy*
- *Basil Mossaides, Executive Director of AHEPA*
- *Nick Larigakis, President of the American Hellenic Institute*
- *Stephen Flott, Flott & Co.*
- *Robert Ranson - Director, University of Virginia*
- *Ioannis Simaiakis, McKinsey & Company - Washington*
- *Dimitrios Skaltsas, McKinsey & Company - Athens*
- *Christopher Hatzis, Columbia University*
- *Jared Talkin, Columbia University*
- *Amalia Kontesi, Columbia University*
- *Rea Zekkou, Design professional*
- *Lefteris Tsironis,*
- *Katerina Sokou, Journalist*
- *Kathy Gillette-Mallard - Phi Delta Kappa*
- *Spiro Alexandratos, PhD- Hunter College*
- *Ari Kalos, WorldWideGreeks.com*
- *Carla Pacalo – Virginia Tech Ph.D. Candidate*
- *Kimon Drakopoulos, MIT Ph.D. Candidate*
- *Spyros Zoumpoulis, MIT Ph.D. Candidate*
- *Giorgos Papachristoudis, MIT Ph.D. Candidate*
- *Constantine Tarabanis, Harvard '15*
- *Paul Stavropoulos, Harvard '13*
- *Maria Theophanous, Harvard '13*
- *Andrew Theodotou, Georgetown '14*
- *Kostas Nestoras*
- *Dimitrios Tzeranis*
- *Lise Visser*
- *Isabel Sheinman*
- *Alexandros Costopoulos*
- *Melanie Graf*

Due to the snowstorm that hit the US East Cost during the program, two of the events were cancelled and will be organized in the near future.