

Address of the Ambassador Mrs. Eva T. Dafaranos

Honourable Minister dear Mrs Jenny Mikakos

Consul General Ms Christina Simantiraki

Dear Chairlady Mrs Varvara Ioannou

Distinguished Professors

Dr. Viviane Nikou, a very good friend and distinguished
paedagoge, Dr. Mitsis

Honourable and dear friend Mr. Pantazopoulos

Your Honour Justice Mr. Emilios Kyrou

Dear members of the Network's Committee

Distinguished guests, dear friends

I am delighted to be among you celebrating the International Women's Day and another year of activity by the Food for Thought Network.

Congratulations for the subject chosen: Παιδεία (Education) and Women. Allow me to express some thoughts on the subject.

When I was studying at the Hebrew University Har HaTzofim in Jerusalem in the mid 80's, I remember my Israeli professors extolling my Greek origin and praising

the terms of “paideia”, its linkage to “areti” and the ideal of “kaloskagathos”.

It is significant that “paideia” – education in ancient Greek is linked with the rearing of a child so as to become a worthy member of the “polis”. I was always enchanted by the ideal of excellence given by our ancestors to education. To become “kaloskagathos”, beautiful and good by gaining areti-virtue.

The Greeks sought balance in all aspects of human endeavour and experience. We all remember the Isocratic notion of intellectual consistency. Knowledge was designed to cultivate the person, to enlarge horizons, to increase spirituality, to build a character.

We all remember the Delphi dicta of Cheilon from Lacedemon: “Miden Agan” (Nothing in Excess) and “Gnothi Safton” (Know Yourself).

So, we often wondered what is the meaning of this goodness as target of education. In fact, it is human quality to the degree of excellence. And I was so happy, as a young university student those days, to remember that “areti” was not only for men as valor; it was also for women. Penelope radiates, in the words of Homer, “areti”.

Aristotle will later insert in the meaning of “areti” the notion of prudence which should measure the disposition of the mind in our daily life.

I have met in many countries and continents during our itinerant diplomatic tour of office, many people from all walks of life, of different ethnicities and creeds and within the boundaries of their own civilisations.

What any human contact leaves to the other fellowman, his / her interlocutor, is the impression a personality leaves as a trace to the other. And what I want to focus on today is the significance of education and its importance in building a character. Particularly for us, women.

For modern Greeks, “Παιδεία” is a life – long process. It begins with the upbringing you receive at home as an infant. The family ambiance, the warmth, care and love are considered essential in the first steps of life. And you will always remember how much every Greek house, big or small, rich or poor, incarnates this ideal.

With the progress of age, both schooling and society at large enlarge the scope of education.

I lay emphasis on character building because if women are to be truly emancipated, it is not only knowledge which sets you free. A good character

enables you to be balanced, to have moderation in your aspirations, to be sociable and responsible and to a certain extent, a role model to the others.

There is no doubt that in our centuries-old history of mankind, ignorance and limited knowledge played a role in subjugating women and causing a lot of hardship to them. In today's developed societies misconceptions on gender tend to become erased with better education, better information. But there is always the inherent danger of remaining clichés and stereotypes.

There lies the difficult task on the part of women not only to be educated, but also to be good fighters, exemplary citizens with a good character and lead by example.

I think that, in the decades to come the ascending trend of the majority of young women excelling in most fields of science, combined with the appropriate education in building a good character, will definitely change for the good the internal dynamics of our societies.

Women as exemplary citizens, co-workers and leaders will definitely become beacons for progress, social peace, values which will have a positive impact as well on the rest of the society, that is our fellow males.

And this dimension is extremely important today more than ever. We see this in international relations where with power resting predominantly in male hands, every state pursues its national interest as if relations were a zero-sum game. On the contrary, where power is in women's hands, we see a great sensitivity for global issues which affect humanity as a totality, such as the protection of the environment, the protection of wildlife, the nuclear non-proliferation, the climatic change and global peace. We see also a lot of internal change within societies and through globalization the opportunity to promote further the gender agenda through likeminded modern women with knowledge and character, a strong belief in humanity and in a better world.

In this spirit, may I congratulate the Food for Thought Network and especially the chairlady Mrs Varvara Ioannou for nurturing this organization for the last 14 years, and enriching it with her personal indefatigable work and vision. I also congratulate her and the members of the board for organizing this important symposium and I am confident that we all are going to enrich our knowledge and expand our horizons through the interventions of the participating speakers.

Lastly, I want to emphasize that I accepted to become the patron of the Network because of my

strong belief that this special organization has the potential to contribute to society and bring together the most enlightened minds of our community.

Concluding, I would like to recite one of the poems from my second book entitled “Humans and Statues” which depicts the essence of my belief that education – paideia without cultivation of our soul is a ship without a captain or compass.

Γ

Την επόμενη μέρα
έπλασε ο γλύπτης
το σώμα του,
διάφανο, λαμπερό, δυνατό.
«Μην ξεχάσεις την καρδιά μου»
ψιθύρισε το Άγαλμα γεμάτο προσμονή.
anticipation.
«Αυτή, πρέπει να την κερδίσεις»
απάντησε ο Δημιουργός.

It was the following day
that the sculptor created
its body,
transparent, luminous, strong.
«Don't forget my heart»
the Statue whispered in
anticipation.
«It is her, that you must earn»
replied the Creator.

Extract from the cycle of poems
entitled “Humans and Statues”
by the Greek Ambassador
Eva (Eyvah) T. Dafaranos

Melbourne, 8 March 2015