

Welcome Message of H.E. Stefan Estermann
Ambassador of Switzerland in Greece

Ladies and Gentlemen
Dear Friends and Colleagues

I would like to wish you a warm welcome to the Swiss Residence in Athens! I was very excited when I learned about the First Panathenea Festival, inspired by the famous ancient Greek festival, to celebrate, connect and compete in the area of Innovation. What a beautiful initiative!

I would like to congratulate the Team of Panathenea, the mentors and all the participants for this brilliant idea. A special welcome to Mr. Lars Rasmussen, one of the main initiators of the Panathenea Festival.

I would also like to greet Mr. Marios Giannopoulos, CEO of Enterprise Greece, and I am happy to announce that later on, Deputy Minister of Development Stavros Kalafatis (in charge for Research and Innovation) will greet us, as the Minister himself had to cancel his participation in the last moment.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Greece is rising again, has overcome the great financial crisis. The Greek Government succeeded in stabilizing State finances and in creating the conditions for a very solid and encouraging economic growth. I was excited to observe the emergence of a still small but burgeoning Greek start-up and innovation ecosystem over the past years. I also noted that many innovative Greek business ideas are born out of bridges that exist between Greece and Switzerland, in particular through the Universities and research institutes.

Switzerland is a world-wide innovation leader, and part of our success is due to the fact that we have been able to attract the best brains. And many of these brains come from Greece! As Greece is rising economically, many of those brains are now coming back, and Greece again has a lot of opportunities to offer. Innovation will be crucial for a sustainable growth of the Greek economy, creating more added value and leading to higher incomes. And it will create a snowball effect to attract more brilliant brains. So, the Panathenea Initiative definitively comes at the right moment!

Dear Friends

I was also thrilled when I learned that Lars Rasmussen is one of the initiators of the Panathenea Festival. Lars Rasmussen is known above all as one of the Co-Founders of Google Maps. I am super proud to have him here with us.

Few people actually know that there is a Swiss story behind Google Maps. Behind Google Maps lies Switzerland's extensive experience in cartography. Already in the 90ies, first attempts were made in the area of digital street mapping, to combine images with elements of traditional maps, and to train computer models to recognise elements of the landscape. A Swiss Start-up named Endoxon was founded in Lucerne in 2001, later bought by Google who established it's office in Switzerland in 2005. Ther rest is history, and a good example of how a seemingly crazy idea and niche project can lead to something really really big.

Today, Google Zurich is flourishing and has become one of the most important research and development centers of Google, with 5000 people from somer 85 different nations.

Before giving Lars Rasmussen the floor for his presentation, I would like to show you a very short film about the Swiss innovation ecosystem.

Thank you very much for your attention!