

# TO BHMA

International edition

SUNDAY, MAY 31, 2026

Featured articles licensed from **THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.**

## These German Politicians Agree With Trump: It's Time for U.S. Troops to Get Out

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Bertrand Benoit

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

BERLIN—When President Trump said he would pull some U.S. troops out of Germany to punish the country for its leader's criticism of the Iran war, Sevim Dağdelen thought: Finally!

"We're extremely grateful for the help in defeating the Nazis," said the far-left German politician. "But 81 years after the end of World War II—after the Russians, the British and the French, it's also time for American soldiers to go home."

Please turn to Page 2

## A Look Back at When Cuba Was a Global Force to Reckon With

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Juan Forero and Jose De Cordoba

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Cuba was at the center of a nuclear confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Its bearded guerrilla fighters inspired 1960s student movements from Paris to Mexico City. And its intelligence services infiltrated America's government agencies.

Now, the island that challenged the U.S. for decades could be making its last stand, suffocated by economic mismanagement and increased pressure from the Trump administration.

Please turn to Page 3



An aerial image, taken by drone, of the cyclical harbor known as Pasalimani, or Marina Zeas, off the center of Piraeus.

TO BHMA International edition

# Piraeus Aims to Become a Destination in Its Own Right

By Maria Paravantes

Piraeus, Greece's largest port, is where everyone goes to take the ferry to the famous Greek islands.

It is where thousands of travelers from all over the world arrive every year on impressive cruise ships eager to visit Greece. It is also where Athenians head on the weekends when they want to get some sun, some

soothing views of the sea, and some excellent seafood and ouzo by the waterfront. Yet of all the people who pass through Piraeus each day, very few decide to stay for more than a few hours. This is set to change.

The port city's mayor and his team are eager to get the word out: Destination Piraeus is much more than a gateway to the Greek islands, it's a starting point to Greece itself. A city with its own iden-

tity, energy, history, and offerings, Piraeus is taking steps to emerge from the shadow of Athens, and claim its place as a destination worth exploring in its own right.

Please turn to Page 6



Artist Jannis Psychopedis in his atelier in Athens, Greece.

TO BHMA International edition

# The Things Jannis Psychopedis Doesn't Want To Forget

By Panos Kougias

For his new show at the Basil & Elise Goulandris Foundation, Jannis Psychopedis has chosen not to stage a flashy retrospective of his sixty-five-year career. Instead, he has set up a "small public square" of some 70 works that are positively desperate to engage viewers in a conversation. Just like he

did back in the 1960s with the "A" art group, when he would load his paintings onto the back of a truck and display them in the working-class neighborhoods of Nea Ionia and Kokkinia, determined to bring art into direct contact with the public and spark a dialogue.

The exhibition "Landscapes of Memory. The Ones I Kept" springs from a core conviction: that if these works are to escape the con-


finer of the artist's studio, they must fulfill some aspect of their social and political purpose.

They may not be his "most important" paintings. They may not be the most "avant-garde" works in his oeuvre, either, as he says. But they are the ones that serve as a continuous thread; that represent a consistency in a world where everything is changing and unraveling.

Please turn to Page 4

**YOU HAVE THE BUSINESS  
WE HAVE THE ENERGY**

**Integrated energy solutions for your business.**  
Find the products that suit your needs, at dei.gr



One with the future

Continued from Page One

The Pentagon's decision to pull 5,000 of its 35,000 troops out of the country within six to 12 months and to cancel a 2024 agreement to station long-range conventional missiles in Germany has caused consternation among mainstream politicians and security officials here.

While many see the drawdown as symbolic, they fear the canceled missile deployment will make Germany more vulnerable to Russian attacks. The impact on European security could be mitigated by U.S. troop deployments elsewhere. Trump said Thursday the U.S. would send an additional 5,000 troops to Poland.

Chancellor Friedrich Merz has spoken to Trump to try to clear the air over his earlier criticism of the war, according to a German official. In other quarters, however, the news is being feted as long overdue.

"For our sovereignty's sake, we really shouldn't be having foreign troops on our soil," said Dağdelen, a lawmaker for 20 years and now a leading member of the newly created far-left Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance, or BSW.

Others have welcomed the news, including the far-right AfD, the far-left Linke and even some members of the center-left Social Democratic Party, or SPD. Parties that officially support pulling U.S. troops out represent about a third of voters, according to current polls.

And while more centrist groups continue to favor the U.S. presence, Germans are increasingly moving on from the trans-Atlantic alliance. Some 73% of voters see the U.S. as untrustworthy and 76% say it is time for Europe to "go its own way," according to a survey earlier this month by the Bertelsmann Foundation, a think tank.

AfD co-leaders Tino Chrupalla and Alice Weidel were among the first to welcome Trump's call to pull troops out. The party's platform for last year's election included the "withdrawal of all allied troops stationed on German soil, and especially of their nuclear weapons."

Such military presence, said Weidel, "is unnecessary in our view."

The reaction to Trump's policies in Europe have defied the traditional left-right political spectrum, bringing together unlikely bedfellows.

As he welcomed the Pentagon's announcement, Chrupalla praised Pedro Sánchez, the left-wing prime minister of Spain, for refusing to let U.S. aircraft on combat missions in Iran



Tino Chrupalla and Alice Weidel, co-leaders of the Alternative for Germany party (AfD).



Sevim Dağdelen of The Left party speaks during a rally in Berlin, Germany, April 12, 2019.

# These German Politicians Agree With Trump: It's Time for U.S. Troops to Get Out

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

From the far right to far left, parties representing a third of voters are cheering Trump's drawdown punishment



Servicemen attend the annual multinational crisis response training Saber Guardian 23 Hospex Operation with a medical focus, at the U.S. Air Force Base in Ramstein, Germany, June 6, 2023.

use U.S. military bases in Spain.

While not a fan of Trump, Dağdelen described herself as "pro-American," noting she had campaigned with Tulsi Gabbard, Trump's departing director of national intelligence, to free WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

Most advocates and opponents of the U.S. military presence in Germany agree

on one point: While the presence is an economic boon for those regions, mainly in southwestern Germany, where the bulk of the troops are based, it isn't macroeconomically significant.

Stephan Protschka, an AfD lawmaker, represents the state of Bavaria, which is expected to be hit hard by the planned drawdown. He said local party officials were generally supportive

of the party's line on wanting foreign troops out of the country.

"Of course there are specific regions that depend economically on the troops. But there is also a growing yearning for more national responsibility among voters," he said. "We are in the process of growing the German military. Maybe the solution is for it to take over these barracks."

One argument against the U.S. presence that has been made repeatedly since the Iraq war is that letting America conduct military operations from the country makes Berlin a party in these conflicts.

This is a problem for a country that has set onerous constitutional requirements to engage in military operations overseas, including a United Nations mandate

and a vote in parliament. The U.S. has used Germany as a logistics node for its campaign in Iran, which many analysts here see as legally questionable.

Some also fear that any foreign troop presence specifically aimed at deterring Russia—like the planned and now-canceled long-range missile deployment—could do the opposite and invite retribution from Moscow.

"We opposed the planned stationing of U.S. long-range missiles in Germany from day one," said Sören Pellmann, co-parliamentary leader of the Linke, or Left, party. "Not just because it is escalatory, but because it would have exposed this region to potential attacks...If you don't make yourself a target, you're less likely to be attacked."

Following the same reasoning, many critics of the U.S. presence say its reduction could persuade Russia that Germany isn't a threat and thus reduce military tensions in Europe, perhaps even hastening the end of the war in Ukraine.

This view is strong in the pacifist wing of the SPD, junior partner in Merz's ruling coalition. Veteran SPD lawmakers Rolf Mützenich and Ralf Stegner both welcomed the cancellation of the missile deal in particular as a sign of de-escalation.

"This stationing would have started a new arms race and I very much doubt it would have made Germany safer," Stegner told Der Spiegel weekly after the decision. Berlin, he said, should now start talks with Moscow about removing the nuclear-capable missiles it has deployed in Kaliningrad, the former German Baltic Sea port of Königsberg and now a Russian exclave.

Today's pacifist arguments have some echoes of the debate that followed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's 1979 decision to match a Soviet military buildup in Europe. Many years later, unclassified Russian archives showed the U.S.S.R. had actively supported pacifist groups in the West that opposed the deployment of upgraded U.S. missiles across the region.

"To think that you can negotiate with Russia without any military backing is an illusion," said James Bindenagel, a former U.S. diplomat under the Clinton administration. He points to the fruitless diplomatic efforts by the West between 2014 and 2022 to pre-empt a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine.

"My philosophy is different," he said. "To quote Frederick the Great, diplomacy without weapons is like an orchestra without instruments."

# A Look Back at When Cuba Was a Global Force to Reckon With

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Now cornered by the U.S. and on the brink of collapse, the Communist island once projected power, backing insurgent groups

Continued from Page One

Cuba's Fidel Castro and his brother Raúl developed an outsize military that projected unprecedented geopolitical power by a Third World country at the height

of the Cold War. Its security force is now a shell of its former self. But the memory of Cuba's global military adventures helps inform the Trump administration's view that it remains a threat to the U.S.



An old car passed by a house decorated with the flags of the United States and Cuba in Havana, as the island was preparing for the visit of U.S. President Barack Obama, March 20, 2016.

## The Bay of Pigs

In 1961, about 1,400 Cuban exiles trained by the Central Intelligence Agency landed at the Bay of Pigs on Cuba's southern coast. The Castros were prepared. After three days of fighting, Cuban forces captured most of the invaders who had run out of ammunition. A lack of promised air support from President John F. Kennedy doomed the mission. It was a resounding victory that cemented the Castros' hold on power.

## Combat in Africa

Tens of thousands of Cuban soldiers fought South African troops in the 1970s and 1980s to prevent the apartheid government from overthrowing Angola's Marxist leadership. Cuban forces supported rebels in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while troops helped Ethiopia repel a Somali invasion. Hundreds of Cuban troops also supported Algeria in its conflict with Morocco. More than 400,000 Cuban military and support staff served in Africa, one of the largest deployments ever of a developing nation in the Cold War.

## Tanks in Syria

Cuba sent an armored combat brigade equipped with Soviet T-62 tanks to reinforce Syria during the 1973 Yom Kippur war and its aftermath, with an estimated troop deployment between 800 and 3,000. Cuban-manned tanks fought Israeli forces in armored duels. Cuban troops suffered some 180 fatalities with another 250 wounded before withdrawing.

## Exporting revolution

Cuba exported revolution across Latin America, which became a Cold War front. While the U.S. supported repressive military dictatorships, Cuba provided training, funds and intelligence to student movements and guerrilla groups from Central America to Argentina. One large Cuba-inspired group is still fighting: Colombia's National Liberation Army.

## Havana's most notable success

Cuba helped topple Nicaragua's dictator Anastasio Somoza in 1979, providing training, intelligence and military aid to Sandinista guerrillas. Somoza was assassinated the following year in Paraguay as he drove in a Mercedes-Benz close to his home, an attack for which the Sandinista government and Cuba provided training, intelligence and logistics.

## One of Havana's biggest defeats

The capture and execution of Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the iconic Argentine guerrilla leader who helped the Castros take power in Cuba, was a huge defeat for the island's efforts to spread revolution. Believing he would replicate the triumph in Cuba, he went to Bolivia with a small group of would-be guerrillas. CIA-backed Bolivian forces captured Guevara.

## Continental influence

Cuba provided ideological inspiration for Nicolás Maduro, the strongman who led Venezuela until his capture by U.S. special forces early this year. Havana was key in the development of Venezuela's notorious security and intelligence apparatus under Maduro's predecessor, the late Hugo Chávez.

## Havana spooks

Cuban spies have been adept at recruiting American officials, turning some into moles who handed over secrets for decades. The American spies didn't do it for money, which Cuba had little of, but because they were sympathetic to the revolution. They included Ana Belén Montes, who for 16 years was an analyst at the Defense Intelligence Agency, including eight years as the agency's senior Cuba analyst. She earned the nickname "Queen of Cuba" by her colleagues for her deep knowledge of the island's military and political affairs. Another longtime mole, Manuel Rocha, spied for Cuba during his 20 years in the State Department, where he capped his career as the U.S. ambassador to Bolivia.

## A direct confrontation with U.S. forces

Cuban and U.S. forces engaged in direct combat on the tiny island of Grenada in 1983. Worried about Cuban and Soviet expansion, the U.S. invaded with some 8,000 troops. They fought Grenadian forces and nearly 800 Cubans, most of them armed construction workers who were on the island building an airport the U.S. said could have posed a strategic threat if open to Soviet aircraft. Twenty five Cubans were killed, 59 wounded, and 638 were captured.

## The U.S. raid that deposed Maduro

Perhaps the most damaging event for Cuba's regime was January's U.S. military raid that captured Maduro at his military headquarters in Caracas. Thirty-two Cuban soldiers and intelligence officers who were part of his security detail were killed in the attack. The end of the Maduro regime also ended vital Venezuelan oil shipments to the island.



January 1959: Fidel Castro (L), chatting with Ernesto "Che" Guevara (R).



Armed parade in 1986, in Havana's Revolutionary Square commemorating President Fidel Castro's landing in southeastern Cuba in 1956, to start his revolution against Batista.

TO BHMA International edition

# An Exhibition About The Things Jannis Psychopedis Doesn't Want To Forget

What remains constant along the way is his noble faith that painting can always meet the contemporary world head-on

*Continued from Page One*

The exhibition begins in 1962 and runs through to the present day, though without setting out to narrate either some linear artistic “journey” or an unchanging artistic identity. Besides, as the artist says, he did his most “Greek” works in Germany and his most “Central European” ones in Greece. The works change forms, materials and languages. From painting to collage and from constructions to mixed media—in defiance of an era in which “purity” of form was virtually an imperative. The paintings flow into one another through close to twenty scenographic sections, without claiming any single affiliation or narrative continuity.

What does remain constant along the way is Jannis Psychopedis’ chivalrous faith; his belief that whatsoever “costume” it may don, painting can always meet the contemporary world head-on. That it can pull up a chair in one of the great public forums of our times and engage the public face to face, without fear of friction or disruption. Which, more or less, is how art strikes a chord with life. And life with art.

**The exhibition has a very personal subtitle: “The ones I kept.”**

**What does it mean for an artist to return not to the works they sold or exhibited, but to The Ones They Kept?**

It is not exactly that these works haven’t been exhibited—though it’s a fact most of them haven’t ever been shown. The key thing is that they weren’t sold. They stayed in my personal collection, which means they acquired a singular character without my having planned it that way. In retrospect, I realized I’d kept two or three pieces from every period of my work. And because my practice has passed through many different phases, these works served as a sort of internal scaffolding for the next step forward—a thread of continuity, even when the form itself was changing radically.

**Changes in terms of form, or media, too?**

Both. For me, the medium has always been an ongoing quest. I’m interested in how different media can



“Construction Site”, 1966. Oil on canvas, 55 x 65 cm.

converse with one another: painting, printmaking, collage, constructions, objects. The boundaries often blur. It is profoundly liberating to express yourself in this way—it doesn’t restrict you, but rather offers a fresh stimulus, opening up new possibilities for both the imagination and our sensitivity. Objects, human relationships, our very environment become catalysts for revealing “dimensions of the gaze.” And while the core remains unchanged, it is constantly seeking out new versions of sensibility.

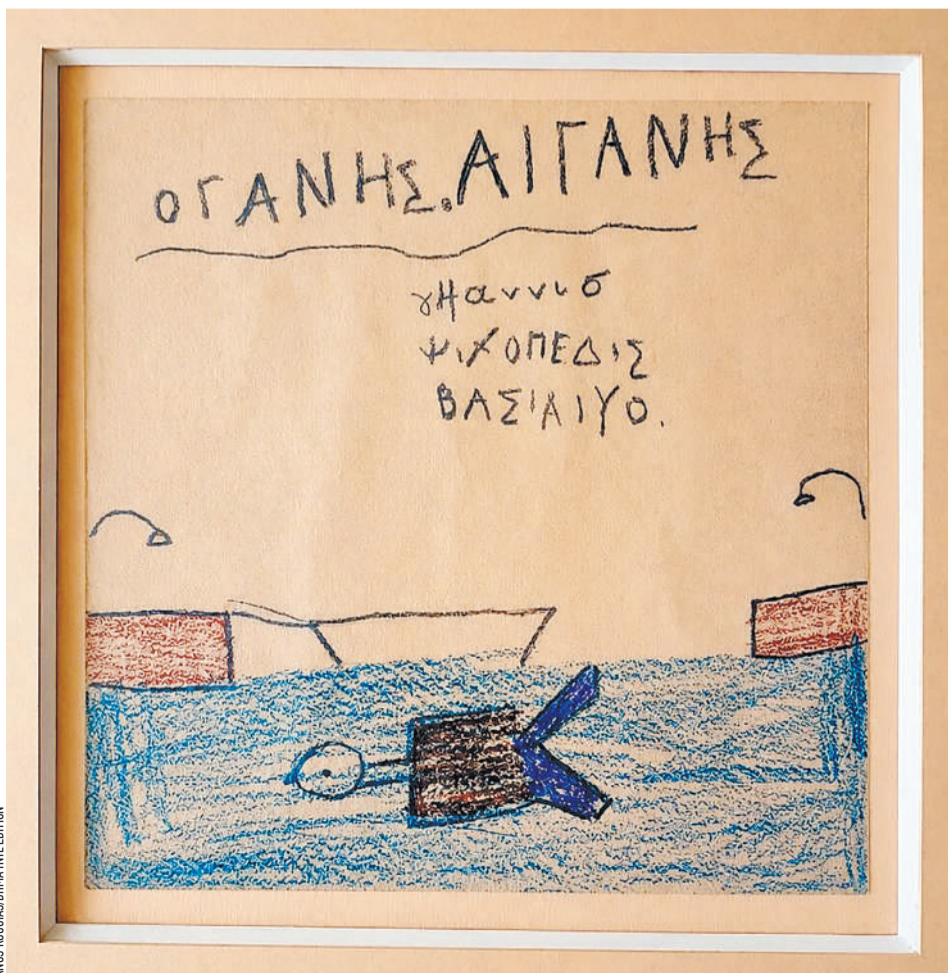
I believe this is what characterizes both my work and this exhibition. From my most erotic to my most political pieces, they all ultimately converge. For me, the profoundly erotic is also profoundly political, profoundly social, profoundly poetic. Together, they comprise a unified quest for sensitivity and expression. This may be what shocks us in the end: just how open we can be to a world of inexhaustible expressive possibilities.

**How did the idea for this exhibition come about?**

Truth be told, staging a retrospective of my work would be an enormous task. The scope of the oeuvre is huge—I’ve

had 107 one-man shows in Greece and beyond, and each one was a coherent whole, not just a collection of works.

I’ve always been interested in taking a subject as far as it will go, which means there’s a massive body of work behind



“Yannis Ayiannis” - the first drawing by Jannis Psychopedis, made at the age of five and preserved by his mother, inspired by a scene from Les Misérables.

each period. Then there’s the logistical side: the lost works, the paintings that have scattered and passed from hand to hand. You almost have to hunt them down like a detective. That the show was to be staged at the Goulandris Museum was crucial, because the space itself guided us toward something more elliptical and simultaneously more personal. Not a complete retrospective, in other words, but rather works I’ve kept in the studio, tucked away in cupboards and corners, covered up; works that have been with me from when they were made, starting in 1962.

**I couldn’t agree with you more: the erotic is simultaneously political.**

Yes, but not in the sweeping generic sense that “everything is political.” I mean that even the most deeply erotic work comes with its own way of seeing the world—an ideology, a stance toward reality.

**If you look back at the young Psychopedis of the 1960s today, what do you see that’s remained a constant in your artistic vision?**

It’s hard to speak truthfully about oneself, but I’ll share something with you that goes back even further than the 1960s. It’s a childhood drawing I did when I was five, which my mother kept safe. It was inspired by a scene from Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*—a book I still return to frequently today. The novel had moved me deeply, because it contained all the great human values: justice, poverty, solidarity, humanism. The scene I had drawn was the one where Jean Valjean, has a chance to escape, but chooses to first save another convict whose life is in danger. He doesn’t leave until he’s sure the other man is safe. What moves me to this day is that moral stance. The concept of solidarity, of justice as a fundamental category of ethics. I think that stayed with me from a very early age; in a way, it still colors my view of the world and of painting.

**Let’s move on to the “New Greek Realists”, a group that emerged during a profoundly political era in Greek history. Do you think art today still has the power to intervene**

### in politics, or has it become more of an aesthetic product?

Let me tell you about one of the works in the exhibition. It's the most unassuming, but for me it's emblematic: a building site from '65-'66. We'd left a neoclassical house in Kolonaki and moved downhill to an area near Michalakopoulou Street, which had very few buildings along it at that time. From my window, I drew this structure as it was going up. Looking at it now, I realize that this little work is exactly what matters. Our transition from the tenderness of neoclassicism—which I don't want to idealize, because it had its flaws, too—to the brutality of concrete. Today, there's a danger that everything will be concreted over—not exempting the Acropolis.

Later, this was the driving force behind the art group "A", when we took our art out of downtown Athens in carts and trucks and into the working-class neighborhoods of Nea Ionia, Kokkinia and Piraeus. We set up the works there, like pop-up exhibitions on the street, and they sparked a raw dialogue with the public—one that was often confrontational.

As the "New Greek Realists", we worked within a realistic, critical, figurative framework. We even intended to do away with individuality completely. On certain pieces, one artist would start from one side of the canvas, another from the opposite end, and we'd meet in the middle, literally painting on the exact same work. We were trying to produce something collective, to lose the signature and replace the "ego" with a shared act.

Then came the Center for Visual Arts (KET). There were twenty of us artists there, with a very specific concept: no middlemen. No gallerists, no dealers, no institutions between us and the public. We wanted to be entirely responsible for our own space and our own work. For producing, showing, and selling it. It was a very pure, almost radical model. And it worked for a while. Years later, when I was living abroad, I was back in Athens and happened to pass by the old shop we'd converted into a gallery back then, near the Polytechnic. I found myself looked for our old sign. But instead of "KET" on the frontage, I saw "PARKET" (Parquet) in huge letters. A business had moved in that sold flooring and wood. And I said to myself: "Look how far society's sunk. KET's great and revolutionary ideas have ended up on the floor as PAR-KET."



The artist's atelier — organized, creative chaos.

### You lived and worked in Berlin and Brussels for many years. How decisive was that experience in shaping your artistic and political consciousness?

It certainly left its mark, but in a more complex way. In fact, it often works in reverse: I created my most "Greek" works in Germany and my most "Central European" in Greece. The two things intersect. Back then, Berlin was an island-city stranded in the middle of the Cold War. It was a place of charming anarchy, but also of incredible brutality. You passed through Checkpoint Charlie daily, navigating border searches and entirely surreal situations. I remember going to East Berlin once to attend a performance at the Brecht Theater. I had some Greek books in the car, and during the inspection, the guards started combing through them, looking for political texts or propaganda. That's when they stumbled upon a book by Giannis Skarimpas. It was called "Two Buffoons' Waterloo." And it was there and then, at the Berlin Wall, that Skarimpas was

first translated into German. Right there, caught between two worlds.

### What are your thoughts on young painters today? Do you see them returning to a different kind of conservatism?

You framed it well; this drift toward conservatism is very real. But it is a complex phe-

nomenon. It stems, first and foremost, from the inadequacies of our academic institutions. But it goes beyond that—there is a broader deficit of critical thought across society at large. We are no longer equipped to process our lived experiences through knowledge, just as we lack a truly creative dialogue that results in healthy disagreement and debate. As

a result, we no longer have cultural touchstones in society, which we need for real debate, or a vital relationship with art that simultaneously interrogates both convention and the status quo. This could be reclaimed through rigorous study in our academic institutions. Sadly, though, this isn't happening. It seems to me we lack the time, the desire, the people and the context. As we speak, subjects such as art and sociology are being thrown off the curriculum. There could be nothing worse than that. In essence, we are producing people who are uneducated, socially atomized, individualistic and stripped of creative imagination. If this is what passes for progress, you can imagine what true regression looks like. Yet, perhaps the most revolutionary thing to happen to education internationally—and to arts education, in particular—is something we often overlook or undervalue: the Erasmus program. My generation missed out on that. Today, a third-year student can head to Barcelona for six months, enroll in a school, and make a life there. And it's nothing like visiting as a tourist. They actually get to live it. They

wander the streets, stay up all night, fall in love, make friends, see other ways of living, and return home a different person.

### You've said in the past that painting is a way of "keeping human relationships alive." Do you think that art today brings us closer together, or does it tend to operate within closed systems?

There's no denying that our times work against the collective. If we look at it historically, in comparison with the 1960s and 1970s—and remember we're talking about a deeply traumatized society, about a Greece ravaged by the war, Occupation and the Civil War, but simultaneously engaged in the process of rebuilding—we see that something was beginning to take shape out of the trauma. It was a phenomenon which also had deep roots in brotherhood and solidarity: a world that connected people's struggles. And that's why a huge social and political movement was forged back then. And that wasn't restricted to Greece; the same thing was happening across the whole of post-war Europe. There was a sense in the air that things could get better. There were people who set an example. And that's the crucial thing: every society relies on these paradigms. It's not the theories you espouse that carry the most weight: it's how you act. The way you exist in the world, without grand pronouncements, that's what the others truly take on board—far more than any theoretical teaching. This example was set by the generation that lived through the Occupation and its aftermath. They provided the blueprint for a world where values were never abstract; where they were demanded, fought for, and won.

### If you needed an alternative title, what would it be? And, in the end, what is it that we "keep" or take away with us?

"The things I don't want to forget." I don't mean the artworks themselves mustn't be forgotten; what we must never forget is who we are—and the entire constellation of experiences, people, and conditions that made you who you are. In other words, our sense of being part of a community. That is what is truly precious—to be able to feel you're not alone in this world. And from that flows the question of how to show solidarity. For me, the concept of solidarity is the ultimate necessity—and, at the same time, contemporary society's greatest loss. There—hold onto that.



BEE GOULANDRIS FOUNDATION

Jannis Psychopedis, an iconic painter and one of the main Greek exponents of Critical Realism, a political and social artistic movement of 1968.

# Piraeus Aims to Become a Destination in Its Own Right

Can Greece's largest port become a city break? Long overshadowed by Athens, Piraeus is taking steps to reinvent itself on its own terms



Piraeus is particularly known for its restaurants, nightlife, maritime heritage, and stunning locations.

*Continued from Page One*

Most travelers to Greece know Piraeus as the gateway to the Greek islands. It's where they hop on a ferry to the islands or arrive on a cruise. Cinema lovers may have heard of Piraeus thanks to the 1960 film classic "Never on Sunday", which featured life in the port's red-light district, and almost everyone knows Piraeus from the film's Oscar-winning soundtrack, composed by Manos Hadjidakis.

The thing is... despite being Greece's largest port and one of Europe's most important maritime hubs, very few travelers consider Piraeus a destination in its own right.

That is precisely what Piraeus Mayor Yannis Moralis hopes to change.

"We want to see the port change from a stopover to a destination," Moralis said during a tourism strategy conference held recently in Piraeus' iconic Municipal Theater in the heart of the city.

The event brought together hoteliers, cruise executives, tourism experts, chambers of commerce and entrepreneurs to discuss the city's future and the hurdles it faces in establishing its own distinct identity.

Moralis, who has served

as mayor since 2014, insisted the city's strategy is already bearing fruit.

"Since 2014, we've taken steps to make Piraeus visible," he said. These include hosting dozens of cultural events, gastronomy festivals, book fairs, participating in international trade fairs, setting up the Piraeus Film Office, and making targeted investments in marketing, promotion and digital outreach. These initiatives are at the center of the city's "Destination Piraeus" strategy, which also focuses on showcasing the city's maritime identity and heritage.

Addressing the event,

Moralis did not mince his words. He acknowledged that with growth come challenges, particularly traffic congestion and mounting pressure on city infrastructure. Still, he argued, the collaboration between public authorities and private stakeholders offers clear evidence of change and progress.

"We have a long way to go, but much has been done. The point is to acknowledge mistakes, move forward, and stick to a plan."

For Moralis, the ultimate proof of this momentum lies in growing investor interest in the city. "The fact that investors are backing

major projects in Piraeus demonstrates confidence in its future. It's a vote of confidence," he said.

Deputy Tourism Minister Anna Karamanli echoed that sentiment, describing Piraeus' transformation as an opportunity not only for the city itself, but also for Greece's broader tourism model.

## A port city with untapped potential

Located roughly 8km southwest of central Athens, Piraeus is home to around 163,000 residents and Greece's largest port. It ranks among the busiest passenger gateways in the world, han-

dling up to 20 million ferry passengers a year.

It is also a major shipping hub, managing more than 5.1 million standard shipping containers (TEUs) annually and generating more than 1 billion euros in economic activity.

Like Athens, its history stretches back to antiquity. The city was the primary naval base of classical Athens and a cornerstone of Athenian maritime power.

Today, it remains a major shipping and commercial center. Yet despite its rich maritime heritage, scenic coastline, vibrant neighborhoods, and one of Greece's hottest contemporary art scenes, Piraeus is still overlooked by travelers, overshadowed by nearby Athens.

Areas like the scenic Marina Zeas and Kastella, with the picturesque Mikrolimano at its feet, all dotted with cafes, seafood restaurants, and bars overlooking the Saronic Gulf are among its main attractions. But it doesn't stop there. The city also boasts some of Attica's finest museums, cultural venues, shopping districts, and its pride and joy: Olympiacos, one of Greece's most successful football clubs.

The mayor and city officials believe these assets are finally beginning to resonate with visitors. At least that's what the latest travel metrics

show. Piraeus was recently included among the "25 Best Destinations for Solo Travel in 2025" in Tripadvisor's Travelers' Choice Awards and recognized among Europe's most authentic food destinations.

"Piraeus has all the ingredients of a standalone tourist destination," said Deputy Mayor for Extroversion, Tourism and European Programs Andriana Zarakeli.

"Our goal has been to create an identity, a brand, and at the same time develop activities and tourism products around the city's many strengths—its gastronomy, nightlife, maritime heritage, cultural venues, filming locations, shopping, as well as its status as a cruise hub," she said. The focus now, she added, is improving accessibility, functionality, and visitor services.

## Piraeus: more than a stopover

Industry insiders attending the conference stressed that Piraeus must diversify beyond cruise tourism if it hopes to increase overnight stays and establish a stronger tourism presence and economy.

Ilias Kikilias, general manager of INSETE, the research institute of the Greek Tourism Confederation (SETE), described conference and business tour-



Despite being Greece's largest port and one of Europe's most important maritime hubs, very few travelers consider Piraeus a destination in its own right.



Piraeus Mayor Yannis Moralis presents the findings of a study during a tourism strategy conference held in Piraeus' iconic Municipal Theater.



An actress's headdress from the collection of the Municipal Theater of Piraeus, accompanied by an excerpt from a theater review published in TO BHMA on December 18, 1975.

ism as one of the city's most underutilized assets. He also pointed to the future Museum of Underwater Antiquities as a potential "game changer" capable of reshaping Piraeus' tourism profile.

According to findings presented during the event, one of the city's biggest challenges remains the short duration of visitor stays, which average just one to two nights. Limited hotel capacity is partly to blame, although new hotels have begun opening in recent years. Another obstacle is obvious: for most international visitors, especially those visiting on a cruise, seeing the Acropolis in Athens is a top priority.

"How can Piraeus compete with Athens then," one tourist agent asked during the discussion.

The answer, several speakers argued, is that it should not try to compete at all.

Nicholas Kelaiditis, chairman of the Hellenic Association of Travel and Tourism Agencies (HATTA), said Piraeus must instead focus on elements unique to the port city itself: its authenticity, maritime culture, gastronomy, nightlife, events, and shipping heritage. Tapping into new markets by offering special-interest tourism products focused on gastronomy, MICE (Meet-

ings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions), medical tourism and cruises can create opportunities, extend the tourism season, and attract higher-spending visitors.

Evgenios Vassilikos, president of the Athens-Attica & Argosaronic Hotel Association, noted that Piraeus could benefit from learning from the mistakes of other destinations now grappling with overtourism. "The priority," he said, "must be infrastructure."

**What visitors actually experience**

The visitor survey conducted by the Institute of

Commerce and Services (INEMY) on behalf of the Piraeus Municipality, and presented during the conference, offered a revealing snapshot of how tourists currently experience Piraeus.

Among those surveyed, 75.4% said they visited Marina Zeas, while 68% spent time in the city's restaurants and bars, and nearly 60% explored the market and commercial center.

Far fewer visited cultural and heritage sites. Only 23.4% toured monuments or the Archaeological Museum of Piraeus, while art galleries, beaches

and iconic neighborhoods such as Peiraiki (aka Pasalimani) and Kastella attracted relatively low visitor numbers.

The findings suggest that many travelers remain largely unaware of the city's broader cultural and tourist offering. On a positive note, perceptions improved significantly after arrival. Nearly half of the respondents (46%) said Piraeus exceeded their expectations. Visitors highlighted entertainment, food, and waterfront areas such as Pasalimani among the city's strongest attractions. Traffic congestion emerged

once again as the biggest complaint.

Still, the results point to growing potential: 42% said they would visit again and 61% said they would recommend the city to others.

**The importance of cruise activity**

Cruise tourism remains central to Piraeus' ambitions. According to figures presented by the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), Piraeus handled 863 cruise ship calls in 2025, putting it among the world's leading cruise embarkation hubs. The port welcomed around 1.85

million cruise passengers, with homeporting accounting for nearly 80% of total cruise activity.

Maria Deligianni, CLIA's regional director for the Eastern Mediterranean, said the growth in homeporting has strengthened the city's economy, with many cruise passengers staying in hotels before or after their voyages and spending on restaurants, shopping, and other tourism-related services.

At the same time, she warned that geopolitical instability in the Middle East could soften demand in the coming years, with forecasts pointing to declines in both passenger arrivals and cruise ship calls across Greece in 2026. Even so, Greece remains among Europe's top cruise destinations, with the sector supporting an estimated 33,000 jobs nationwide.

For the Piraeus authorities, the challenge is now clear: they need to create meaningful tourism experiences that give transit passengers a good reason to stay and explore. After decades of functioning primarily as a gateway, Piraeus is now seeking to step out of Athens' shadow and establish a tourism identity of its own. The transformation has already begun.



MARIA PARAVANITES

# 'Amber Alert' for School Psychologists

As adolescent mental health concerns rise across Greece, students, teachers and experts warn that school psychologists are overstretched, barely visible and unable to meet a growing crisis unfolding inside classrooms

By Michaela Maria Derizioti

**"A** Psychologist? At my school, it's like they don't even exist. Most of us don't even know what they look like, or even their name."

Sixteen-year-old Nikolas answers instinctively when TO VIMA asks whether he has ever spoken to his school psychologist. Nikolas attends a public school in Athens' southern suburbs. He does not fully understand what mental health means, but he does know that whenever he needs help, he turns to his history teacher, the person he trusts more than anyone else.

He is lucky to have him. But, what if he didn't? He says there is nothing worse he can imagine than feeling pressure and anxiety building inside you and having no one to talk to.

Yet Greece's relevant ministries, Education and Health, have yet to create a solid support network capable of identifying and addressing young people's mental health problems in schools, especially at a time when cases of depression and self-harm are on the rise.

In the town of Karpenisi, Rodothea Karfi, principal of the local vocational high school, explains that this branch of secondary education does, in fact, benefit from more organized psychological support services within the school environment.

"We even created a psychologist's office," she says, describing the room's decoration and explaining how carefully the school selected the special "therapy rug."

Listening to her, one thinks that many schools across the country truly can function properly, though often thanks mainly to the volunteer efforts of their staff.

But Nikolas's answer pulls the conversation back to reality.

"I've never gone to the psychologist and, honestly, I don't feel like they could help me anyway."

## Recruitment and absences

The Ministry of Education responds to such criticism by pointing out that, in the last academic year alone, it appointed 3,005 substitute psy-

chologists and social workers to schools across Greece.

So, where are they? TO VIMA's reporting reveals that in many cases they barely register within school communities, because each psychologist may be assigned to as many as five different schools, visiting each only once a week. As a result, they are unable to build meaningful relationships with any of them.

"At the end of the school year, many students I've worked with ask me if I'll still be with them next year, but honestly, I have no idea what to tell them. I'm not even certain I'll be there the following week," school psychologist Evangelia Adamopoulou tells TO VIMA.

For the 2025–2026 school year, she is responsible for five different schools, spending one day per week at each and sometimes even filling the role of a social worker.

"As things stand," she says, "our role is more counseling than therapeutic, because there simply isn't enough time to properly do the work of a psychologist."

Anna, a high school senior, says she knows only two students in her entire school who have approached the school psychologist.

"Kids don't go easily — neither do I," she admits.

Still, she understands that inside classrooms, behind grades, absences and disciplinary reports, a silent mental health crisis is unfolding, one most people can see, but very few are truly equipped to manage.

"The hardest part is handling crises," Adamopoulou continues. "In these very limited hours, we're asked to assess which situations are most serious and focus on those first."

"We need to stay constantly alert so that no child slips through unnoticed, especially those who may not appear to need help."

And somewhere within this constant, yet incomplete, state of vigilance, the tragedy that occurred this month in Ilioupoli weighs even more heavily on the school community.

As the days pass since the suicide of two underage girls, the discussion surrounding teenage mental health has largely moved outside

the educational system itself.

"We didn't discuss it at school," says 17-year-old Anna. "We talked about it with friends, mostly about how tragic it was."

In many schools, the case never entered the classroom in any organized way. It remained confined to hallways, schoolyards, conversations between teachers, and groups of students trying on their own to understand how two girls their own age reached such a point.

Maria Kalograni, principal of a school in the Attica region, describes exactly that picture.

"It was discussed individually by some teachers during lessons and quite a lot in informal conversations between teachers and students outside the classroom. Some children felt the need to speak or listen without exposing themselves in front of the entire class."

Yet behind the closed doors of school classrooms, teachers and specialists see a generation emotionally exhausted.

Children struggling to sleep. Children withdrawing. Children constantly comparing themselves to images

on social media. Children who feel they are never enough.

"In recent years there's been greater sensitivity because of the role social media plays," explains Athena Dourou, a school psychologist and systemic psychotherapist. "What children seek, and what ultimately torments them, is recognition from their peers. They want to resemble others, fit in, and become one with the group. But this also stems from the growing emotional distance between parents and children, because that is where insecurities begin."

## 'My child doesn't smile anymore'

Meanwhile, Athens High School principal Dr. Michalis Patsis describes scenes that concern him more and more.

"I see children in constant tension. Students shouting, throwing books in class, unable to calm down. I often wonder: is it simply bad behavior, or is there something deeper underneath?"

He speaks of teenagers trapped in endless anxiety. Of mothers approaching him saying, "My child doesn't smile anymore." Of chil-

dren waking in the middle of the night and pacing restlessly through the house.

"Teachers today do far more than teach," he says. "Without being specialists, they often become the classroom psychologist."

And yet the actual mental health professionals are absent from schools most days of the week.

In most schools, psychologists divide their time between multiple campuses, appearing at each school only once or twice weekly. If a public holiday, school trip or illness intervenes, their presence simply disappears.

Stelios Stylianidis, emeritus Professor of Social Psychiatry at the Department of Psychology at Panteion University, psychiatrist-psychoanalyst and honorary president of the Scientific Association for Regional Development and Mental Health (EPAPSY), has launched a series of research and intervention programs in Greece's public schools.

Among them is the psychosocial intervention initiative "It's up to youth," funded by the Ministry of Health.

He describes the state's interventions as "largely superficial."

"What is needed," he explains, "is a radical restructuring of the educational system toward strengthening students' emotional and social skills, critical thinking, cooperation, empathy and responsibility."

"What could be implemented immediately is the creation of interdisciplinary teams operating permanently on a pilot basis, with accountability and evaluation, which would later become organically integrated into school operations."

And as school psychologists continue moving from campus to campus, rushing between classrooms, offices and "emergency incidents," students will continue growing up with a strange kind of emptiness, one that makes no noise, yet exists in all those small moments no one ever has the time to truly hear.

Within that reality, the words of 17-year-old Nikolas no longer sound exaggerated, but simply like an honest description of the world he lives in: "At my school, it's like they don't even exist."

