

# Andreas Dracopoulos on ert.gr: “We can all do more for a better society.”

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By Aleka Stavropoulou

**Andreas Dracopoulos, Co-President of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation**, spoke on ert.gr to Aleka Stavropoulou about the vision of his late uncle, Stavros Niarchos, the legendary figure of global shipping, a great Greek who left his mark internationally with his business activity.

Today, the philanthropic work of the organization that bears his name stands out on a global scale—in a variety of directions—spread out across more than 120 countries. From 1996 until today, the Foundation has committed more than 2 billion euros in grants to support various initiatives.

The Foundation’s latest major grant pertains to the Greek health sector, with more than 200 million euros made available for the creation and the outfitting of hospitals, strengthening the National Center of Emergency Care’s (EKAV) air ambulance services, and developing educational/training medical programs.

Another major point of reference in Greece is the emblematic, architecturally impressive Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center (SNFCC), the creation and construction of which was exclusively undertaken by the SNF, with a grant, totaling more than \$860 million dollars. The SNFCC was subsequently gifted to the Greek State, in 2017.

**Andreas Dracopoulos** was born in Greece. He graduated from Athens College, and went on to study in the US, where—although he remains a citizen of the world—he mainly resides until today.

He is a Trustee of The Rockefeller University in New York, Johns Hopkins University (JHU) in Baltimore, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington. In March, 2018, in a special ceremony at the Presidential Palace, the **President of the Hellenic Republic** awarded Mr. Dracopoulos the rank of the Grand Cross of the Order of Honor, in recognition of his work and immense contribution to his country.

He was **Stavros Niarchos’** favorite nephew, the grandson of his sister, **Mary Niarchos-Dracopoulos**, and he is the person largely in charge of the Foundation’s activities, a role that his uncle envisioned in order to implement his vision of giving back to the community. I met Mr. Dracopoulos at the Foundation’s offices, near the center of Athens.

A man particularly true to his word, a man who, from the very first handshake, you understand that you are dealing with a calm power, a conversationalist with a charisma in communication and a directness. From the course of the discussion, it is easy to discover that this is one Greek who loves his country very much and is sincerely interested in helping his

fellow humans. He was optimistic about the potential gradual recovery of the Greek economy, noting, however, that there is much that remains to be done, primarily focusing on the fact that young people need to have an incentive to stay in their homeland of Greece.

**Q.: “Thank you for the honor of giving us this interview on the ERT website. Mr. Dracopoulos, you are the nephew of the late, great, Stavros Niarchos, the legendary Greek entrepreneur, so I am taking this opportunity to ask you to tell us a few words about him. What do you remember from the years that you worked with him and which basic principle did you adopt from him in your life?”**

A.: “I would also like to thank you for this opportunity. I worked closely with my uncle for the final 6-7 years of his life. These were times of a lot of hard work. At that point, he had already completed his shipping activities, we were very close, and we were dealing with many different investments around the world. We both believed that, in life, you must always work hard, no matter who you are. He was very interested in Greece, he always read Greek news and visited regularly in the summer. That is why he had bequeathed to the Foundation a very significant amount of his fortune, to continue to help his country. Through the Foundation, we are helping our country, along with many other countries, by making grants around the globe for the past 22 years.”

**Q.: “Did you ever work in shipping?”**

A.: “No. Shipping was a very small part of the Group’s activities at the time I started working with my uncle. In recent years, we have completely moved away from the shipping business, and the sole object of our activity, through the Stavros Niarchos Foundation and only through the Foundation, is philanthropy.”

**Q.: “The Stavros Niarchos Foundation is a reference point for our country, and internationally. Are you seeing your uncle’s vision coming to life today?”**

A.: “I believe that he would be very happy with the work that is being accomplished. Of course, he would not be happy with the crisis that our country is going through, but he would be happy that we, as a Foundation, are able to help. We have been to 124 countries, and we have helped with more than \$2.5 billion dollars around the globe, but our main area of activity is and remains—before, during and after the crisis—Greece, which is my uncle’s and our family’s country of origin.”

**Q.: “Why do you think your uncle chose you to head the Foundation? What made you stand out?”**

A.: “We had a lot in common. Mainly, that we both believed in hard work, in appreciating opportunities given to you, and in giving back as much as you can.”

**Q.: “The Foundation announced—and signed in March, 2018—a major grant in the health sector; a donation of more than 200 million euros, a grandiose project. What exactly is it about and when do you believe will it be delivered to the Greek State?”**

Q.: “It is a special initiative; I call it an “umbrella”, which really consists of 7 individual grants. It includes a new building for the General Hospital of Komotini, the creation of a Children’s Hospital in Thessaloniki, the construction and outfitting of a new building to be

erected in the current location of the Sisters' House and Nursing Sisters' buildings on the premises of the General Hospital "Evangelismos," in Athens, which will serve as the Chair of the University's Faculty of Nursing. Furthermore, it includes the procurement and installation of special medical equipment (PET/CT Scanners and the creation of radiopharmaceutical production units) in selected public medical institutions across the country. Moreover, we are supporting educational programs in relation to the treatment of trauma and hospital infection, while strengthening EKAV's air ambulance services. This is an integrated effort, in the context in which we always work, namely that we do not replace the State, but we try to complement it. For this reason, we collaborated—and continue to collaborate impeccably—with the Health Ministers, Mr. Xanthos and Mr. Polakis. This effort started with certain discussions with Prof. Rousos, concerning Evangelismos Hospital. After several meetings, the Ministry of Health shared with us the needs it deemed as a priority, we agreed, and now we have begun. We have also agreed with architect Renzo Piano, who will undertake the design of the infrastructure projects, as part of this new initiative, as he did in the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center. Together, we visited Thessaloniki and Komotini, the designs are already underway, and the project is moving at a fast pace. It is, of course, a large-scale project and it will take several years to complete. However, several individual grants within the initiative have already advanced, such as the outfitting of the Evangelismos Hospital. We are proceeding with the fastest pace, with excellent cooperation with Renzo Piano and his team in Genoa, but also with the government, and I am very optimistic that this project will be similar to the Cultural Center in terms of quality, and that it will have a very positive effect on our society."

**Q.: "What other philanthropic activities do you intend to support through your Foundation?"**

Q.: "For 22 years now, we have been supporting all areas: Health and Sports, Social Welfare, Arts and Culture, and Education. In all these areas, both in Greece and abroad, we are continuously present. We always believe that when a project can help society and contribute, we must consider it carefully, being more sensitive and cautious on focusing on why we would say "no," instead of why we would say "yes." We have a positive predisposition to things. We always try, where we can, to help."

**Q.: "August marks the end of the Memoranda in Greece. Do you consider the recovery of the Greek economy feasible? Which do you think are the necessary interventions to get the 'locomotive of the economy' up and running?"**

A.: "I don't live in Greece, but I do follow the news. We have an opportunity as a country and as a nation, but for decades we have not taken advantage of it. In my opinion, Greece should be working according to the model 'March 1 – October 31', that is, 8 months, and the other 4 months, November, December, January and February, should be a period of respite and dedicated to our preparation for the next season. We have the weather and nature as allies, and we should be working in tourism, agritourism, and culture. We have it all. What we lack is the right mentality and the necessary infrastructure to live in such a country. This is what the future of Greece would look like for me; 11 million happy, content inhabitants. The crisis has greatly damaged Greek society, and the psychology of citizens. I think a lot about young people, because they are in their 20s and 30s, even older, in a country that does not offer many opportunities. Wages are extremely low and things are very difficult. When I travel and meet new Greeks abroad, working in very high positions, I tell them: 'I am happy for you, and I am glad that you are doing well, but I feel sorry for our country.' And they feel

the same. Because it is a very bad thing that young people are basically forced to leave the country out of necessity, and the situation keeps deteriorating. Things might be a little better—and I do believe that they are—that is, the worst is behind us, but, on the other hand, our vulnerabilities lie in our infrastructure and our mentality.”

**Q.: “What would you advise a young, capable person with a promising CV today? Should they stay in Greece and keep trying, or move abroad?”**

Q.: “My heart tells me ‘they should stay in Greece,’ but my mind would advise them to ‘leave the country.’ Unfortunately. And, when it comes to this part of society, we must all try harder, for the young people. I believe, of course, that the situation has improved, but we are still talking about a lack of meritocracy, transparency, opportunities. There is still a lot to be done, in terms of mentality and infrastructure, and in order to escape the narrow and confining partisan and political environment. I believe that governments must work for the people; they must serve the people. Sometimes the opposite occurs. This is a global phenomenon. A lot of work must yet be done, and we must have a spirit of cooperation, for the good of the country.”

**Q.: “In an earlier interview, at the beginning of the crisis, you had stated that very wealthy Greeks could do more for Greece. Do you still embrace this view?”**

A.: “I believe that everyone can do a lot more. The media, politicians, all of us. We must work together and help, according to our role, for a better society. I believe that there is room for improvement in all areas.”

**Q.: “Would you be interested in entering politics and help under this role?”**

A.: “At the moment, I am very happy with what I am doing, and I believe that through the Foundation we are contributing a lot to making the world around us and society at large a better place.