

Opening speech by **Andreas Dracopoulos, Co-President, Stavros Niarchos Foundation**

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the second annual Stavros Niarchos Foundation conference on Philanthropy and thank you for joining us!

When we had the idea of organizing our first conference last year, it seemed that it was going to be more of a “one off” event, but we were glad to see that, if nothing else, the conference had provided a platform for many involved in the philanthropy world to get together and exchange views about how we can all improve in our respective missions. Such platforms can be used to discuss issues productively, to learn from one another and to share new ideas. We hope that this conference can play this simple but important role, so again thank you all for being here.

*“The Role of Philanthropy Within a Social Welfare Society”* is the subject of this year’s conference. When, more than a year ago, I first read about this notion of a ‘social welfare society’ in an article by Anders Aslund, a Senior Fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington DC, who is here with us today as a participant and speaker, I was hooked on it. A simple notion, yet at the same time so powerful, just like life itself. The issues that we are all facing today in this truly global and complicated world we live in, are immense: any State on its own, any private enterprise on its own, any philanthropic effort on its own, they all have proven and, in my opinion, will probably continue to do so, inadequate to deal effectively and equitably with most of today’s problems. We need to work together, not in a philosophical sense, but in everyday life. We also need all of the healthy powers of the State, the Private sector, and of philanthropy to collaborate in the most effective way possible, especially in the midst of the current global socioeconomic crisis, which affects the real lives of ordinary people. Only then we can hope that societies at large will be equipped with what is necessary to provide a healthy, decent, able, civil environment for all of its members, all around the world. We simply need the right evolution and all the existing healthy powers of all sectors of life to work together, in order to restore the right to dream, and the right to see one’s dreams become a reality. In terms of Philanthropy’s own important role towards achieving a better society, we must never forget that Philanthropy itself cannot by any means, and should not, replace the State. It can only work on a complementary basis.

As I mentioned earlier, we hope that all of you will find this conference as a productive opportunity to meet one another, learn from one another, and hopefully to find common goals that we can all pursue together.

Philanthropy can be expressed in various ways, and not only by providing financial support. Volunteers of all sorts, as well as the people who passionately commit their free and/or professional time and expertise to create and run many philanthropic organizations are the real heroes and the ones who provide the necessary links, so that any financial support can prove effective. Philanthropy, when implemented properly,

when there are no other agendas present, and when there is real social value-added, should be gladly and gracefully embraced at all times.

In terms of Greece's current serious socioeconomic crisis, more should be done by local, well-to-do individuals and by local foundations. The needs are enormous and the responsibilities of those who have the means to contribute are equally big. Their reluctance to engage in the social arena in order to help alleviate the social crisis is disappointing. On the other hand, through the *European Economic Area Agreement*, an effort led by the Norwegian State is funding projects in Greece that aim to promote equal opportunity, tolerance, security, environmental sustainability and a decent standard of living for all. The project is at the core of a social

welfare society and so are the efforts of successful entrepreneur, philosopher and philanthropist, George Soros and his philanthropic endeavors to help alleviate social crises around the globe. All of us who are actively involved in philanthropic activities realize that none of us is perfect in any sense of the word, but we do try hard and we firmly believe that collectively every effort is instrumental towards a better tomorrow for all of us.

Within this social welfare society, public-private partnerships of all kinds and all sizes are also instrumental and necessary to provide an essential basis for effective collaborations. In all such cases, the multiplier effect can really do wonders.

So, enough said on my part. I hope that all of you find that the presentations and discussions to follow can remind us all that through collaborations we can achieve a lot and eventually contribute to a better society for all of us, by alleviating suffering and by creating the right circumstances for decency, civility, and hope. Aristotle once said, that educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.

Lastly, I would like to thank all of my colleagues at our Foundation for all they do, day in and day out, and special thanks to Lenia Vlavianou and Stelios Vasilakis for all their hard work in organizing this conference. On behalf of all of us at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, we thank you for participating in this conference.