

## International Conference on the Role of Foundations during the Economic Crisis

### Day One Overview

The first day of the two-day International Conference organized by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, in collaboration with the European Foundation Centre (EFC), on the role of European and international philanthropic institutions under current socio-economic circumstances, has concluded successfully.

Participants from Greece and abroad discussed the dimensions of the European socio-economic crisis, and analyzed the contribution of foundations towards helping to address a plethora of social problems, with particular emphasis on the Greek situation.

The Conference was officially convened by the **Co-President of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Andreas Dracopoulos**. He welcomed and thanked all the participants for their willingness to share their views, experiences and know-how, and to discuss ways to further improve philanthropic foundations, as well as strategies to address in a more comprehensive manner current societal needs. Andreas Dracopoulos also emphasized the importance of shifting from a “welfare state” to a “welfare society” as a way to effectively address today’s critical issues.

The first workshop, on the new challenges and needs facing European foundations, opened with the presentation by **Angel Font Vidal, Strategy and Human Resources Manager at the Spanish Foundation “la Caixa”**. Vidal discussed the Foundation’s strategy in designing special programs that combine short-term solutions to the crisis (food, shelter, employment) with long-term changes in people’s lives, aiming to address the severe problems caused by the economic crisis in Spain. The workshop’s second speaker, **Emilio Rui Vilar, Trustee of the Portuguese “Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian”**, made references to the innovation-driven structural changes that foundations ought to foster, given the adverse economic and social conditions that threaten the viability of non-profit organizations. Within that context, Vilar pointed out that public, private and non-profit organizations should not act alone, but work together towards common goals that can lead to the creation of more efficient societies.

During the Conference’s second workshop, **Simon Levitt, Strategy and Communication Consultant at “Harwood Levitt Consulting”**, in his role as a moderator brought to the audience’s attention the different ways in which philanthropic foundations can tune in to citizens’ concerns and adapt their programs correspondingly. He also brought up the common fallacy that foundations, through their actions, replace state funding. **Peter Economides, Brand Strategist and founder of Felix BNI**, in his speech stressed foundations’ responsibility to complement state efforts in order to support society, as well as to encourage creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship so that they can “facilitate the transformation of dreams into reality.” As part of the same workshop, **Nikos Xydakis, Editor-in-chief, Kathimerini**, provided an account of the historical evolution of the notion of philanthropy from classical antiquity to Byzantium to the great benefactors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and finally to today’s foundations. Finally, **Thomas Fischer, Executive Director, Brussels Office, Bertelsmann Stiftung**, discussed the critical role of foundations in identifying social problems and challenges and consequently focusing on developing solutions that can assist in addressing them.

The day’s proceedings concluded with **Ioannis Trohopoulos, CEO and Managing Director of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center**, who focused on the role of public and municipal libraries as centers of education, inspiration, creativity and innovation during the crisis. He alluded to winning of the Gates Foundation’s annual Access to Learning Award by the Veria Central Public Library, as he characteristically stated that: “From Veria to Gothenburg and back to Athens, this journey demonstrates the power of creativity and gives hope to local societies”.

The International Conference will conclude tomorrow, July 6th, with speeches focusing on philanthropy’s role in responding to the crisis, and aiming to present successful practices implemented by European and American Foundations, as well as Greek non-profit organizations.