

Speech by the Minister of Tourism of the Hellenic Republic Ms. Olga Kefalogianni at the 2nd Stavros Niarchos Foundation International Conference on Philanthropy

Introduction

Dear guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

Dear organizers from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation and the EFC,

Allow me, to begin with, to welcome your distinguished guests to Greece and express my joy and satisfaction that such an important conference is being held in Athens.

Social welfare state or philanthropy?

In discussing the role of philanthropy within the contemporary social welfare state, we must carefully examine the case of Greece.

Especially under the conditions imposed by the crisis.

A multifaceted and complex crisis.

That exceeds the economic dimension.

A crisis that one could say amounts to a social welfare crisis.

Which, in certain cases, takes on tragic dimensions...

It amounts, in other words, to the recession of the welfare state. A process of recession that begun some time ago, and made worse by the economic conditions of the past five years.

Allow me, at this point, to make an important clarification.

Philanthropy in our country might be weak compared to other countries, but we cannot, under any circumstances, look at that in a linear manner, as a direct consequence of the crisis.

The limited tendency for philanthropy is primarily due to the absence of a culture of voluntary contribution and, of course – to be entirely correct – to the state’s inability, for a number of decades, to function efficiently and provide support for substantial philanthropic, volunteering and social solidarity actions.

I dare say the crisis has strengthened social ties.

It has highlighted the value of solidarity.

It has enhanced the role of voluntary contribution.

It has driven some of our fellow citizens into action.

The recession of the welfare state has given rise to new forms of philanthropic action.

Self-help groups, Society of Citizens associations, important private organizations have proven to be the more active and effective in providing help now than at times of prosperity.

So many emergency response groups were created “within the walls” that the actions of philanthropy have become more visible.

But while it is obvious that the welfare state is receding and a large part of the foundations and the society of citizens is taking action, it must be made clear that the state cannot give up on its fundamental duty for social welfare. It must become better, more effective, more flexible. It must collaborate, adapt, and change, but not give up.

Philanthropy must not replace the state, nor must the state replace philanthropy.

Three stereotypes about philanthropy

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me, at this point, to bring up certain stereotypical views that have prevailed in our country with regards to the institution of philanthropy.

Views that have affected – and continue to affect – our propensity for philanthropy and social contribution.

First Stereotype: "Philanthropy is the business of the upper social classes – it only concerns the few."

It is understandable that such an impression would be cultivated in a period when the average citizen struggles to cope with their everyday needs. It must be made clear, however, and we all have a part to play in this, that philanthropy is not just for the few. It's not just about cash donations and, even when it is, it's not just about large sums of money.

Philanthropy is voluntary contribution in itself.

From the very first euro.

The first food package.

A voluntary contribution to charity groups.

That's why it's everyone's business.

That's why it needs to become part of mass culture in Greece. An integral part and a habit in the life of every citizen.

Second stereotype: "Philanthropic foundations fail to listen to the real needs of society"

This misunderstanding often arises, as the work undertaken by Philanthropic Foundations, though it certainly does improve infrastructures and social benefits, often seems to be removed from the core of social needs.

What do I mean by this...

When a philanthropic foundation supports a Museum in a remote part of Greece, it is obviously a beneficial action with positive impact on the local society; to a citizen, however, suffering from the effects of the crisis, it might not be what will change their life for the better.

There is, however, a warped impression of reality. Because foundations do not just have the above – important – role. Allow me to give you a representative example. It is a well-known fact that

the state has failed, in the last few years, to provide quality care for drug users, especially when it comes to marginalized long-term users of drugs.

The Stavros Niarchos Foundation, identifying those gaps, offered – in conjunction with KETHEA – a new medical, dental and psychological care unit for users. As the Minister of Tourism, but also as a resident, MP and active citizen of Athens deeply involved with the issue of drugs in the city, I can only describe this action as absolutely necessary and targeted.

Perfectly adapted to the ongoing social request for offering better care to users and tackling the drug problem in the capital. An action at the very core of the problems faced by a Capital city much tested by the crisis. Aimed at resolving a serious problem.

A real action, not a promotional move.

The same applies to the Foundation's important initiative to provide food aid in schools of Attica. Which the Foundation runs quietly, and with great respect.

Third stereotype: "Philanthropy doesn't need the state."

There is this view as well, ladies and gentlemen, that philanthropy can and should work without the state.

Allow me to disagree, without, however, meaning to imply that the state should manage or control the actions of philanthropy.

The state can support the institution of philanthropy in several different ways.

No one wants the philanthropic Foundations, which carry out substantial and responsible social work, to withdraw, and that is something that must be avoided at all costs.

It is the responsibility of all of us, especially today, when the state is forced to cut down on its spending on welfare, to provide actual support, to establish productive collaborations, so that the

Philanthropic Foundations might produce tangible and measurable work.

Work that is often more effective and – why not? – better than the work of a dysfunctional state.

We must admit, therefore, that the state needs philanthropy. It needs collaboration on all levels.

From the simplest to the most complex.

The Ministry of Tourist has the pleasure and the honor of building, step by step, with care and respect, its collaboration with the Stavros Niarchos Foundation.

Without drumrolls and pointless promotional exaggerations, we are laying the foundations for a true relationship of trust.

For the benefit of the citizens of Athens, for the benefit of Greece.

Our first step: the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Center for Hellenic Studies at Simon Fraser University is producing a tourist application for smartphones and tablets.

For AmazingAthens!

A contemporary tool for promoting Athens.

A small but important step of collaboration between the state, the Foundation and the University in Vancouver. There are thoughts, ideas and proposals for moving on to more daring, more complex steps.

We have made a start and that, as far as I'm concerned, means we're halfway there.

Epilogue

Ladies and gentlemen,

Under the adverse conditions imposed by the economic crisis, it is imperative that we take collective action against retreatism and defeatism.

I believe that private initiative has proven that it can play a critical role, through the escalation of corporate social responsibility

actions, through mass social solidarity campaigns, through systematic work in the field of the crisis. Citizens on an individual level may also support the trend of volunteering and incorporate giving and solidarity into their everyday habits. Similarly, the Society of Citizens must overcome its chronic pathologies and become stronger, inspiring the citizens into voluntary contribution and philanthropic action.

At the same time, the state must find ways to adapt to the current, challenging conditions.

Within this scheme of synergy and shared responsibility, it is imperative that the State takes action to provide real support and work together with the organizations and foundations of philanthropic and voluntary contribution.

This is a bet we're all invested in.

Supporting philanthropy in such a complex environment is a one way street.

There is no margin for individuality and social introversion.

We are all charged and tasked with making this clear through tangible actions.

Through education that will establish social contribution and philanthropy as a constant value and a part of mass culture. We have already wasted enough time through the years.

It is now time for action.

Thank you.