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## **International Greeks**

By Christos Zampounis

*1 billion Euro in grants by the Niarchos Foundation*

**Andreas Dracopoulos**

### ***In the footsteps of the great benefactors***

*He is the nephew of Stavros Niarchos and, in his capacity as president of the homonymous foundation, he manages grants totaling 1 billion euro. With a new program to address the direct effects of the recession, he believes that “the Foundation’s activity will motivate others who are in a position to – and ought to – help”.*

On April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1996, at the Canton Hospital in Zurich, the self-made shipping magnate, Stavros Niarchos, breathed for the last time. Together with Aristotle Onassis they are rightly considered the most important Greek tycoons of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast to his Smyrnian counterpart, Niarchos was an introverted man of few words, who detested publicity. It is no coincidence, after all, that the day of his funeral, at the Orthodox Church in Lausanne, those attending did not exceed four-dozen people. Among them were king Constantine, Niarchos’ four children, Spyros, Philip, Maria and Constantine, his sister, Mary Dracopoulos, her son Costis and her grandson, Andreas. Nowadays, Andreas Dracopoulos is in charge, along with his cousins, Spyros and Philip, of the foundation that was created for the purpose of making grants in the areas of social welfare, education, health and medicine, and arts and culture, as it was clearly requested by his uncle in his will. Aristotle Onassis had done the same in 1975, eleven years earlier, but with a significant difference: Niarchos’ contribution to the endowment of the foundation was more than double from the one made by his eternal competitor. “*I want at least half my fortune to go to Greece*”, he reputedly told his family shortly before he passed away, and they, in turn, wasted no time in honoring his wish. In 15 years, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation has made 2,000 grants, totaling US\$1.3 billion, in 95 nations, with the lion’s share going to Greece. “*The percentage is about 80%, but if Greeks abroad are taken into account, it exceeds 85%*,” remarks Andreas Dracopoulos. With the exception of the programs that the Foundation undertakes by its own initiative, there are three criteria for an external grant application to be approved: the project’s added social value, the existence of appropriate people to manage the grant, and commitment to the idea.

**Born in Athens** 48 years ago, Stavros Niarchos’ grandnephew, after graduating from the Athens College, enrolled at the famous Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, in the US. Despite the fact that since then he has been residing permanently in New York, he never severed his ties to the country of his birth. Every summer, together with his Greek wife and their three children, they visit Greece, usually traveling around the Aegean islands. Up until recently, when his grandmother was still alive, he would always stop by her apartment on Irodou Attikou Street, thus re-immersing himself in this way in the family traditions. During his recent trip to Athens this past June, he presented, along with Italian architect Renzo Piano, the models for the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center, which is already under construction at Faliro Bay. It is a large-scale project, with a €566 million budget, which is expected to transform the capital. There, at the site of the former horse race track, the bulldozers are at work and the metropolitan park, which will be home to the

National Library of Greece and the Greek National Opera, will be ready by 2015. “We believe that the Cultural Center is of great national significance and has substantial transformative potential for our country, and especially for Athens. The project certainly creates great expectations and a sense of optimism and hope for the future,” he told *THEMA People*. In response to concerns as to whether the Greek State, to which the completed project will be delivered, is capable of running it properly, Andreas Dracopoulos is adamant: “The Foundation’s role is to complement the state, not to replace it”. Those who have seen the models – myself included – cannot conceal their admiration for the dialogue between the Acropolis and the Sea, facilitated by an elevated hill that will be created for that purpose within the 240,000 square meter site. At the same time, they recognize the environmentally responsible nature of the venture, since the park will take up 85% of the site, with only 15% allocated to the buildings, whose energy requirements will be completely covered by photovoltaic panels.

**At a time when our country** is fighting for survival, this grant connects us conceptually to the systematic activity of the major benefactors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Averof, Zappas, Syggros, Tositsas, etc), who freely gave a part or even the whole of their fortune to the then bankrupt Greek state. Coming back to the current state of affairs, it is likely that some will protest, with the customary penchant for populism, that... the world is in turmoil, and we’re concerning ourselves with opera houses and libraries?

The answer, in addition to the reasonable argument that the project was designed before the recession, is provided by the Niarchos Foundation’s announcement of a program consisting of a series of grants, totaling €1,500,000, to address the problem of homelessness and provide food aid to those in need. “We are fully aware of the enormous needs that exist in all areas and all across the country, as a result of the extended and continuing economic crisis, and especially in the field of social welfare. Social problems are acute, we are all experiencing them on a daily basis and, to put it plainly, the Foundation cannot ignore them. On the basis of the above, and by the Foundation’s initiative, we have launched a pilot program with an initial budget of €1,500,000 and in conjunction with two non profit organizations, PRAKSIS and Artos-Drassi, aimed at providing Social Housing services to prevent homelessness, which is a growing problem, creating Day Centers to provide relief for the homeless, and offering food aid. The Foundation is eager to do even more, and to expand these programs, in order to help as many of our fellow human beings as possible,” Andreas Dracopoulos points out, adding: “We would like to believe that our foundation’s activity in helping to relieve some of the social problems will motivate others who are in a position to – and ought to – help”.

*The Stavros Niarchos Foundation is in the process of creating, at Faliro Bay, a large-scale project, with a €566 million budget, that is expected to transform the capital, and incorporates the National Library of Greece and the Greek National Opera.*

**WITH A SERIES OF GRANTS TOTALING 1,500,000 EURO, THE NIARCHOS FOUNDATION SHOWS ITS SOLIDARITY WITH PROVIDING FOOD AID AND EVEN COMBATING HOMELESSNESS, FOR THOSE IN NEED**