



STELIOS PAPADIMITRIOU 1930-2005

Stelios Papadimitriou was born in Alexandria, Egypt in 1930. He graduated from the Law School of its University in 1953. In 1954 he first met the legendary Aristotle Onassis, who entrusted him the oil transfer program of Saudi Arabia. S. Papadimitriou moved to Saudi Arabia in 1954, and lived there until 1960. He developed an important body of laws for the Saudi legislature in the field of maritime law. In 1960 he returned to Alexandria where he worked as a lawyer in an important law firm specializing in maritime law. In 1966 he finally moved to Greece with his family.

The bond between Onassis and Papadimitriou was very strong and lasted until the death of A. Onassis. In recognition of Papadimitriou's character and professional aptitude, Onassis appointed him in 1970, at the age of 40, legal advisor and member of the Board of Directors of Olympic Airways, Chairman of Olympic Aviation and member of the Board of Directors of his private Bank, Banque de Dépôts, in Geneva. At that time, Papadimitriou became acquainted with Pavlos Ioannidis, Apostolos Zabelas and Paraskevas Ioannidis, officials at Olympic Airways, with whom he developed a deep lifelong friendship. Later on, Onassis appointed Papadimitriou General Manager of his fleet which then consisted of 70 ships, mainly oil tankers. In parallel with his occupation at the Onassis Group of Companies, Papadimitriou pursued his legal career, becoming one of the leading lawyers in Greece and internationally.

Following the death of his son, Onassis asked Papadimitriou and Pavlos Ioannidis to protect and advise his daughter, Christina. S. Papadimitriou overviewed the contents of Aristotle Onassis' will. Onassis assigned him as one of the five executors of his will, according to which half of his fortune was bestowed to the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, created in memory of his son. Papadimitriou was one of the 15 first life members of the Foundation's Board of Directors. While Christina Onassis was the first President of the Foundation, Stelios Papadimitriou was Secretary, eventually becoming Vice President.

Following the death of Christina Onassis in 1988, Papadimitriou was elected President of the Business and subsequently in 1992 of the Public Benefit Foundation.

Under his inspired guidance the Foundation has become one of the most influential benevolent institutions internationally. Its far-reaching activities can only be briefly recapitulated here. The Foundation has distributed over 4.278 scholarships in meritorious young people from all aspects of Arts and Sciences to further their knowledge and experience in Greece and abroad. These alumni of the scholarship program are already exerting a strong beneficial influence in cultural and scientific affairs in Greece and all over the world. Moreover, 600 scholars of Hellenic civilization from practically every country have been offered scholarships to further pursue their studies in Greece.

The Foundation has allotted prestigious awards to outstanding personalities or foundations in the fields of Culture, Social Contribution and Environment. Moreover, in 1994, it instituted the Onassis International Cultural Competition Prizes for original creations in drama, music, choreography and painting. These prizes have encouraged young creators from all over the world; overall over 4.000 have participated.

The Foundation has also helped numerous groups, institutions and foundations in their goals. The Church of the Annunciation in Alexandria, Saint Nicholas of Myron in Turkey, the Concert Hall of Athens, the Onassis Library for Hellenic and Roman Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York are among its beneficiaries.

A very important and successful project has been the creation of the Affiliated Public Benefit Foundation in the United States of America. A cultural landmark, the Onassis Cultural Center housed in the Olympic Tower, on Fifth Avenue, New York, has organized numerous important exhibitions such as Alexander the Great: An Epic Era of Hellenism, From Byzantium to Modern Greece: Hellenic Art in Adversity, 1453-1830, Athens - Sparta: from the 8th to the 5th Centuries B.C., Giorgio De Chirico and Greece: Voyage through memory, From the Land of the Labyrinth: Minoan Crete, 3000-1100 B.C., Exhibition of art work by the Onassis Foundation Scholars, Approaching Heaven, with Icons from the Velimezis Collection, Worshipping Women: Ritual and reality in Classical Athens. It offers an important view of Hellenic history and civilization. Currently, the Foundation is deeply immersed in the creation of an outstanding Cultural Center in the heart of Athens which is expected to profoundly influence the city's intellectual and artistic environment.

It is generally acknowledged, however, that a fundamental contribution is the Onassis Cardiac Surgery Center. Apart from building and totally furnishing the hospital before donating it to the Greek State, the Foundation regularly supports the hospital by renewing and upgrading its biomedical equipment and by funding various educational and training activities and international meetings. The hospital has reversed the pilgrimage of Greek patients abroad, through its excellent results and pioneering techniques in Cardiology and Cardiac Surgery. Moreover, it has become a center of outstanding scientific production and offers an excellent educational program.

Stelios Papadimitriou was married to the teacher of Hellenic literature and language Alexandra Krassaris since 1953 and they have had three sons: Anthony, lawyer and present President of the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, George, Civil Engineer and Dimitrios, distinguished composer and director of the 3rd Programme of Greek Radio Television.

As a person, he was characterized by a very keen intellect and sense of humor, a very complete and far-reaching education and refined artistic taste; he was a lover of art, music and poetry. He was a man of absolute personal integrity, a loyal friend and a brilliant host, excelling at conversation. His contribution to Greece and the world will continue for many years to come.