Andreas Dracopoulos, Co-President, Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF)
Opening Remarks at the SNF Nostos Conference

“Kalimera, good morning to all.

We have to start with a word that sometimes wakes us up, sometimes puts us to sleep:

COVID 19-21.

First real global health crisis in every respect in the history of humanity, with more than 212 million infected, close to 4.5 million deaths, with the issue of collateral damage having been discussed so extensively during this health crisis as if we were in the battlefield. Yes, there is a war going on.

Meanwhile, other than the vaccine, the two main defences against it have been social distancing and mask-wearing, two measures not very human themselves.

COVID has exposed many pre-existing weaknesses all around the world. Lack of leadership and lack of proper coordination at many levels, serious and significant socioeconomic injustices all around, at times justifiable lack of trust of global institutions. In many ways it has exposed many shortcomings of our own humanity as we know it, as we live it.
Another issue that has come up to the forefront is the issue of mental health, something that most were unable or reluctant to even talk about before. We all now hopefully realize that as much as we talk and take care of our physical bodies, we do have to do the same for our mental health. This is going to be a major issue to deal with in the next years to come, a major issue.

Our own humanity is under attack, much more important than the repercussions of COVID itself.

Conference / Nostos:

Started in 2012 on the back of the Greek socioeconomic crisis, we thought a proper platform was needed for different people, organizations, to get together and exchange ideas. It was never meant to be a platform to necessarily find answers, but more important to bring to the surface the issues that have been bombarding our modern ways of living, our modern societies, and to discuss possible ways to improve society at large.

So, this is our 10th conference, and in the last few years we have embraced it with art festivities under the Nostos umbrella...

There is no doubt that this year Nostos has taken all of us at the SNF to our limits in every possible logistical way, and not only, but we are here, and more important you are here, and we thank you! We thank everyone joining us, physically or virtually, especially the ones in New York right now that are going to be joining us virtually in the middle of the night, as we all try to regain our normalcy—whatever normalcy may mean for each one of us and for all of us collectively.

At this point I would like to personally thank a few of my colleagues who have gone above and beyond in making sure that we can be here today:

For the Conference more specifically, Stelios Vassilakis, Elenia Saloutsi, Anna-Kynthia Bousdoukou, Panagiotis Pantelatos, Giorgos Bousdoukos, Asimina Koutroumpousi, Elize Dracopoulos, Andrew Zolli, and everyone at our production team, at Viewmaster. Thank you.

For the Nostos Festival, Panos Papoulias, Mily Paschali, Asimina Koutroumpousi, who I’d like to also say, thank you for an amazing show with the drones last night and whoever didn’t have a chance to see it, it will be on every night just before 23:00, Panagiotis Pantelatos, Alexia Vasilikou, Giorgos Bousdoukos, Christina Lambropoulou, Thanassis Politis, Vassilis Laliotis, Elina Klaridopoulou, Vassiliki Derpanopoulou, Christina Ataroglou, Dimitra Chatzivasiliou, Rachel and Ollie Chanoff. Also, and I know sometimes these are names, they are people behind everything that happens, and sometimes we tend to forget that and we take for granted that things just happen. But they don’t. Takis Koulouvaris, Stavros Boglou, Thodoris Daviotis and the whole team at Regeneration & Progress for all they do, year in year out, day in day out, and for an amazing run yesterday, which I don’t know how many of you had the chance to take part… But it was the first, I think, organized run, during COVID-19 and we are very proud of that and I hope you all enjoyed it. Elly Andriopoulou, Christina Vassilikou and her whole team, Katerina Kotsiarini, Charis Maropoulos, Roula Kokota, Sara Kostala, Stravros Stavropoulos, Dimitris Protopsaltou and the whole SNFCC team and everyone, of course, at our production team, at Viewmaster.
**Humanity and AI:**

So here we are. Humanity AND AI. There is a reason, or at least there should be a reason, why it's “Humanity AND AI” and not “Humanity Versus AI,” and more important why “Humanity” comes first.

We humans are partly responsible for having compromised/commoditized our own humanity in so many ways. Our humanity has been weakened and has become vulnerable. We have all seen this in a clear way during the ongoing COVID pandemic. We have been exposed, but at the same time maybe we have been given just another chance to collectively “regroup.” But really, how many more wake-up calls do we need? Not only to be better prepared before the next pandemic, which is going to come, but to deal with the clear onset of the new era of “digitization” in its many evolved versions, in the last couple of centuries or so, to deal with the, at times, aggressive introduction, some may say intrusion, of technology and AI into our daily, and not only, human lives.

There are many experts with us during these couple of days who will elaborate, discuss, help clarify, cause us to think and understand about the issues we are facing in this dancing away of humanity and AI. Technology at large involves numerous opportunities and challenges. It can help us live a better life, for all, but there are many challenges along the way, and depending on how we deal with them it will determine if humanity, our own humanity, can still have a say in tomorrow’s world. Our world!

A lot of emphasis was put on IQ up to a few years ago, but i think it’s clear IQ's own value has been commoditized and diluted itself. You can just Google almost anything you need/want to find out about. The emphasis now should be on something that we seem to take for granted and we ourselves don’t seem to appreciate it to say the least. It’s back to basics, its about our human/emotional intelligence, our EQ, a core element of our humanity, and perhaps our strongest element in what should be our collective human approach to deal with the clear onset of AI, to help us embrace and engage with AI, and with all our strength to help humanity shape AI in such a way that they will coexist, and why not for AI to serve humanity instead of simply replacing us. It’s about our having a say in how we going to live in this new Brave New World. And as Christopher Hitchens said back in 2003 at the end of his foreword of Aldous Huxley’s Revisited *Brave New World,*”….there is no escape from anxiety and struggle,” it's how you manage it, but we can still fight together for a better tomorrow, for all humankind and help us stay human! We all need, as much as we all can, to do all we can to help improve education, health care, justice, decency. Bring back hope, for every human soul in this world.

2021 marks our 25th birthday: it's a quarter of a century, it’s a big landmark for us.

I would like to thank our founder, the late Stavros Niarchos, and all of our colleagues at the SNF who have all contributed to our mission to try help improve the lives of our fellow human beings around the globe in these last 25 years.

So, we wanted to share with you our own “25 years in 25 minutes” as we reflect on what has taken place and as we regroup to plan our next 25 years to serve society at large.

Thank you!”