ONASSIS INTERNATIONAL PRIZES

Speech by
Professor Dr. Anastasios M. Tamis
Director of
National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research
La Trobe University
Victoria, Australia

Athens, 18th October 2006

Your Excellency Mr. President,

It is with deep emotion that I accept this honoured distinction that has been named after the most distinguished businessman of mankind of the 20th century, a patron of arts and literature, a refugee and immigrant, a national benefactor. On behalf of La Trobe University in Melbourne, my colleagues, the benefactors, sponsors and friends of the National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research, I express our feelings of gratitude and jubilation to the Honourable President and the members of the Management Committee of the benevolent Alexander S. Onassis Institution, for their decision to honour and support our Centre with their trust.

For us, the expatriate Greeks, this honouring distinction, is, at the same time, a struggle and a conquest, ordeal and achievement. It is a struggle and a conquest because it actively brings us to the forefront of our responsibilities, it humbles us, it shows our restrictions, the scope of activities that we must upgrade so there could be a continuing quality driven evolution of our university institution. It is, though, also a conquest and an achievement, because it encourages us, it guides us to betterment, to greater heights, it makes us participants of a cultural attack in the far away neighbourhoods of the world where we have settled, serving a homeland with a panarchaic culture and vision for the mankind.

The establishment and worthiness of the National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research in the conscience of the academic community, of Hellenism, of the Phil-Hellenes and other nationalities of Australasia, is owed largely to the love of the Hellenist Vice-Chancellor and enthusiastic Hellenophile Professor Michael Osborne, the altruism, devotion and generosity of a mega patron of the arts and literature of Hellenism in the Diaspora, Dr. Zissis Dardalis and his family, the aspirations for Greece that is demonstrated by the hundreds of friends of our National Centre in Greece, Cyprus, America and Australia and who are represented at this glorious ceremony, by the President of the Society of Hellenic Studies, Mr. Tassos Revis, Mr.

Stylianos Angelodimou, Mr. Nikolaos Kyriakou, and Mr. Andreas Philokyprou to the actual apprehension of the Hellenic State, that supports, and to the conscientiousness and professionalism of my colleagues at the National Centre. We are also indebted to the former Rector of the University of Athens, Professor Georgios Babiniotis for his unfailing trust and commitment to this centre and to Hellenism in Diaspora and to a large number of distinguished colleagues from the Universities of Crete, Thessalonice and Athens. To all the aforementioned and all those who collaborate, align and join this common journey in our effort to serve Hellenic Culture abroad, I express gratitude.

The National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research is aware of its potential, we have the capabilities, we have priorities and a vision, we have conviction, we also have, though, restrictions. Frequently we are confronted by crises in our communication with Greek and Cypriot institutions, we regularly distinguish the condescendence of an endemic pathogenicity of this crisis. However, we resist and move forward.

The repatriated Hellenes and their institutional bodies in the Diaspora are recipients of serious socio-economic and political influences, dangerous mutations, provocative differentiations and pressures, that place constant ordeals on the cultural physiognomy and ethno-lingual identity of millions of people, that all reduce their origin to Greece and the Hellenes.

The last years, forms and structures of the Hellenic communities in the Diaspora, are influenced greatly, its survival and the method of networking the potential of what best it has to offer. The methods of resistance against their ethno-linguistic assimilation are modified, the strategic reactions against their cultural demolition are revised, and new methods are developed. The modern effects of globalised television, the telecommunication revolution and the attempted globalisation of cultures, influence greatly, positively and negatively, the attitude, form and structure of Hellenic communities in the countries they have settled.

These changes set the character of the Hellenic Diaspora in a continued passage, differentiate the old social constitution models, they shape various extended hearths of action and generally strengthen the ties of the communities with Greece and Cyprus.

In the past, the Greek Diaspora operated with a focus of cohesive devotion in the cultural heritage and ancestral relation and shaped a triumvirate substance between Greece, the Hellenic Diaspora and the country of settlement. In our days, the role of the Hellenic Diaspora has been expanded, electing the relations of the Hellenic

communities, not only in an interrelation with the country of settlement and Greece, but in concatenation with all the other countries that are involved, negatively or positively, on issues that concern Hellenism. The Hellenes of the Diaspora maintain their desire of the ethno-linguistic autonomy and their readiness to react when their cultural vested are threatened.

In the past, Hellenes of the Diaspora sought to confront the challenges they met, inter-communally, with an introversion that alienated them, cut down the strength of their resistance and condensed the dynamic of their reaction. In our days, global technology offers mechanisms of convergence of the Hellenic communities of the Diaspora, opportunities of creative reformations of the past, bidirectional dynamics of continued and robust communication with Hellenes in Greece as well as abroad.

Your Excellency, the focus of the changes taking place around the world and indeed in our mutual homeland, Greece, it is not the Governments and its Institutional bodies, but man. Baudelaire has masterfully pronounced that "the worldwide decline or progress will not be expressed in the political institutions but in the trivialisation of our hearts". In these days we are living self-complacent nihilism, that morbidly expands in the world, a nihilism that adapts the attitude of our life to the acquired of society, leaving the field of reaction comfortable with the pillage of the reality of a globalisation that deactivates and inactivates its citizens, a society without classic education, with universities that create executives but do not educate, with professional training, without the basic knowledge of ancient Hellenic thought that will lead to a quality in our lives. The worst for Hellenism is for the Hellenic communities of the Diaspora to be shaped into masses without will and without prospect, because in this way we will wound mortally the ideology of progress and we will mould citizens who will powerlessly confront the future.

Your Excellency, we have the desire to advance, to remain active, with a profound conscience of our role and our mission. It is this principle, the role of which is sealed by the decision of the Alexander S. Onassis Institution to induct our humble Centre in the catalogue of credible institutions that honour with their trust, to place us amongst the illustrious institutions that it praises. We feel especially moved, when this acknowledgement is offered in the centenary of the birth of the leader of Hellenism of the great *Mikrasiates* A. S. Onassis.

I thank you.