"Greece at the Crossroads - How can we help?"

Event Summary: November 9, 2011

On Wednesday, November 9, 2011, a panel discussion was organized by the Hellenic Society Prometheas at the Founders Hall of St. George Greek Orthodox Church in Bethesda, MD. Speakers included:

- Dr. Stamatis Krimigis, Chairman of the National Council for Research and Technology (NCRT) of Greece;
- Dr. George Pavlakis, Researcher at the National Cancer Institute (part of NIH) and member of NCRT; and
- Prof. John Baras, Prof. of Electrical and Computer Engineering, University of Maryland.

Dr. Achilles Adamantiades, Energy and Environment Consultant, moderated the discussion.

The main purpose of the panel discussion was to follow-up on Dr. Krimigis' appeal to the international scientific community to offer support for the efforts of Greece to achieve its objectives of economic recovery through an orderly implementation of much-needed reforms (the full text of the letter is attached).

Dr. Krimigis explained that the NCRT, an advisory council to the Greek Ministry of Education, aims basically at helping the authorities to design and implement a national strategy for science and technology for the coming decade, with a view to promoting Greece's development prospects. The members of this new council, serving on a volunteer basis, had already undertaken and supported some important initiatives but faced a number of challenges due to the economic crisis. Against this background, he noted that his letter to the international scientific community had been prompted by an urgent request to cut down Greece's contribution to the R&D budget by some 30 percent and to consolidate the existing research institutions to a much smaller number, about one half the existing. Implementation of such a drastic adjustment cut, based on arbitrary criteria and in a hasty manner, would have a disastrous impact on Greece's R&D infrastructure. For this reason, Dr. Krimigis was seeking the support of the international R&D community to avoid arbitrary cuts and unreasonably hasty reforms, and, instead, allow for a more reasonable time path to implement Greece's reform goals in an orderly manner. Finally, Dr. Krimigis encouraged other members of the Greek Diaspora to support Greece's efforts at this very difficult time.

Dr. Pavlakis provided more information on the role of NCRT and the issues facing the scientific community in Greece. NCRT (consisting of 11 prominent members of the international scientific community) has already accomplished substantial achievements: it provided input to the reform of higher education recently approved by the Greek Parliament by a wide margin and with bipartisan support, established an annual procedure for selecting research applications on a strictly meritocratic basis to be

financed with funds from the European Union (called the ARISTEIA program); and is in the process of helping in the consolidation of the Greek Government's R&D program and the development of a 10-year R&D strategy and program.

Dr. Baras placed the discussion in a wider context, focusing on the critical importance of research and innovation for economic development, citing successful experiences he has had with similar efforts in other European countries and institutions, notably in Sweden, Austria, and France. He noted that these were difficult times for higher education, worldwide. Although Greece's problems were more acute and to some extent particular to the country, they could benefit from the experiences of other European countries. He agreed with the urgent need to: (i) strengthen the Greek research infrastructure, though not necessarily via total reliance on government; (ii) make more and better use of European Union research funding; and (iii) encourage research volunteers in the Greek Diaspora (including experienced retirees) to help Greece through partnerships, exchanges, and collaborative efforts.

The presentations of the panelists can be found in the website of Prometheas (http://www.prometheas.org/).

Meeting participants, of about 80 persons, had the opportunity to ask questions and offer comments and suggestions. Noteworthy among them were the following:

- The need for the Greek-American community to support the role of the NCRT, as a very specific and fine example of rendering assistance to Greece. Since research and technology are critical to long-term growth and development, the Greek authorities should be sensitized to give high priority to these sectors, and sustain their efforts by supporting the NCRT and other key institutions.

- The need to emphasize better enforcement of intellectual property rights in Greece; the absence of such protection discourages innovation and the conversion of novel ideas into successful enterpreneurial activity.

- The advisability and possibility of establishing, with the assistance of the Greek Diaspora, a think tank that could assist Greece to achieve its full potential in science and technology, as well as other critical areas.

- Efforts outside the strictly scientific field could be useful as well, specifically an effort to strengthen Greek civil society and its Non-Government Institutions (NGOs) through exchange of visits, correspondence, joint projects and the like. Members of such an organization, established recently in the Washington area, called Green Hellenes, were present in the meeting and expressed this idea with force and conviction.

- It was also emphasized by the audience that tackling the current multifaceted problems in Greece, including wide-spread tax evasion, a spirit of impunity for violation of the law and regulations, and corruption, in general, require a

sustained effort to cultivate good citizenship; it was also recognized that his effort needs a much broader approach on the part of many sectors of the society and economy and lies beyond the limited scope of the objectives of the present meeting.

N.B. Meeting participants who did not have a chance to participate in the discussion, as well as others who did not attend the meeting, are welcome to send their ideas to:
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