

# Strong alliances in education appear more than necessary

**Meletios Dimopoulos, Rector, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, highlights the potential of educational institutions**

**What can you tell us about the challenges of advancing academic and scientific excellence while upholding the legacy of Greece as one of the world's ancient centers of higher learning?**

Greece is exiting a ten-year period of fiscal austerity that had major social repercussions. We have a major problem with brain drain, as large number of graduates from Greek universities are seeking further career developments abroad. In order to revert this effect, we need to expand our research programs and attract scientists after they complete their post graduate studies. Another important challenge for us is to develop BA degrees and curricula in English. We now have the first program initiated after a struggle of 2 years, given that there was significant skepticism from the government's point of view. Our plan is to try expand our undergraduate studies in English in order to attract foreign students, especially from areas outside the European Union. It is our strategy to address subjects and curricula that are more attractive to foreign students. A third challenge is that we have been under-staffed, given that there have not been any new positions, especially in the area of administrative staff. According to the Greek system, all university employees, either in administration or teaching areas, are paid by the government, belonging to the public sector.

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Meletios Dimopoulos, Rector, NKUA

Every year the government used to give to the universities a certain number of positions for administrative staff and professors. Since 2010 this has ceased; we have managed to recover some positions to a certain degree for the faculty, but, unfortunately, no progress has been made in the administrative area. We are lacking people and certain expertise that had been developed over the years, such as informatics and specialized personnel in the field of accreditation.

**How badly did the crisis affect NKUA and what types of innovative programs and initiatives did you launch in order to counteract any of the negative effects?**

We have a special account where we subtract a certain percentage for research programs. We are shuffling some funds from this account, which has the goal to support further R&D, to cover some of our basic needs. However, we need to have a better system in order to attract donations. In Greece, the legislation is not very friendly towards donors, leading them to not get any



kind of benefit. We need to demand from the government to improve and increase the budget and staff positions. Then, we have to work with the government to develop a friendlier system towards donations. A third point is to develop the procedures for attractions of further support. We have a major issue with the infrastructure in our university, as our major camp was built in the 1970s. These buildings demand a lot of maintenance so that they are adjusted to offer a safe operating environment.

**Internationalization has been among your top priorities as rector of the university. In addition to the Erasmus program, what other key partnerships would you like to highlight as some of the institution's best?**

We have been part of an ambitious program called European Universities Initiative. We have formed an alliance with other 7 universities called CIVIS, where we encourage international collaboration. Being supported by the European Union, we promote staff and student mobility across universities. The end-

point is to have common undergraduate programs. There was a competitive application and among 60 applications we were one of the 12 programs that were granted EU funding. On another note, we are launching Greece's first undergraduate program in English in September 2020. We are working closely with embassies and the Ministry of Education, in order to be able to promote this program and potentially more international curricula in the future.

**That is your vision for driving research at the University to continue to push the boundaries of knowledge?**

As universities become more and more internationalized, we have to promote and expand collaboration among universities. We also want to expand our collaboration with the industrial sector as well as other sources and facilities that rely heavily on research, in order to attract more funds and strengthen ourselves. To me, this is a prime example of modern research collaboration.



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