

**Ms. MARIETTA GIANNAKOU , Hellenic Minister of Education**

*Transcribed from a recording of the Minister's talk and translated from the Greek*

Mr. Chairman of the Conference, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased by this initiative, as it is directly connected to a host of developments occurring in higher education, not only in Greece but the world over. Within the European Union, these developments are being driven by the Knowledge and Information Society, a force which is overturning the assumptions we have held till today, particularly in light of the pace of research in the last few decades. A second factor is the crisis in the labor market, which has created problems in our otherwise prosperous society.

At the international level as well, research has shown that higher education “produces” a large number of university graduates who in many cases find the door to the job market tightly shut.

This situation has also revived the old ideological debate of whether the role of Universities or higher education institutions in general is to respond to the demands of the job market, or whether Universities themselves should determine what type and kind of knowledge should be taught to students.

I personally believe that reality compels us to recognize both sides of the argument as equally important values. Of course, universities, technological institutes, and higher education institutions, have, in and of themselves, their own autonomous value. Their inherent value is directly connected to science and technological developments. At the same time, however, it would be irresponsible if we overlooked developments in society and the economy and failed to provide the opportunity to young people to earn academic qualifications that count in the job market as well. We therefore need to combine both values and proceed with changes that are focused on the quality of education. The issue of quality in higher education is hardly something new; on the contrary, it is quite a long-standing one. The renowned ENQA is the organization responsible for quality assurance in education, and developing the common framework and regulations regarding quality in education, as well as the initiatives taken in 1997 at the Lisbon meeting, which was followed by the meetings of Bologna, Prague and Berlin.

I remind you that in the beginning most higher education institutions held a negative stance. Today there is hardly a higher education institution, which, does not admit that although education in Europe is mostly a national affair for each country, we must be unanimous in our efforts in order to make the necessary decisions.

Nevertheless, through other European policies such as the freedom of mobility and open borders, and taking into account the fact that knowledge knows no borders, education – specifically higher education --is also influenced in an indirect manner. This is due to the need for higher education institutions to create the preconditions for young people who complete one of their study cycles – undergraduate, graduate, or post-graduate – to have their qualifications recognized in other areas as well.

Greek policy on these issues is along these same lines. I congratulate the Hellenic American Union and the Hellenic American University for taking this initiative, and I want to say this conference is an exceptionally timely one, since we are now having major discussions in our country on these issues within the framework of the national dialogue on education.

Surely, nothing is achieved without provoking certain reactions, and opposing views always surface. Nevertheless, the moment has come to realize that no one can take the road ahead alone, and it is

absolutely necessary, particularly in education, where new initiatives take time to yield results, to open a meaningful dialog for investments in human resources and the creation of a policy in education that will shape the next 20 years.

The Greek government has made education a priority for social dialogue. Of course, the current Administration is pursuing a very concrete program and has set priorities for policies on education and culture. We have said, however, that we could move beyond our original program on these issues, if we come to agreement with the other political forces through open dialogue, and within the broader, contemporary, European and international framework, to change things. We do not want to change things in education just because a Minister changes, even if it's a Minister from the same Government.

The same discussion is taking place in 12 other European countries right now. There is a need to take into account the Knowledge Society, support young people, and at the same time respond to demands from the society and the economy, not only of each country separately but of the whole of the European Union, and the entire world. And this is because, as I said before, knowledge knows no borders.

Many important issues have arisen through the above discussion. One of them is the agreement between the Administration and the Opposition on the principles governing quality, the assurance of quality in higher education, and the development of a system of credits that accompany young persons throughout their lives and the diplomas they receive.

Following along these lines, we have added our own ideas through our proposals at the Bergen Summit and the Meeting of Ministers in Brussels. It is essential to make explicit that regardless of any individual arrangements existing in various countries for intermediate or other types of educational services, there must be three cycles of education – undergraduate (Bachelor), graduate (Master), post-graduate (Doctoral)-- established in Europe and internationally.

At the higher education level, research is very crucial and there are many opportunities in research that must be exploited. If we look at the government funds that go towards research in Greece, we will agree that they are still rather inadequate. European funding provides great support in this area and our ambitions are to both increase funding and improve the level of research.

The current Administration has promised to allocate 5% of the Gross Domestic Product towards education, an increase from the 3.7% figure that is budgeted today. At the same time, we must stress that if there aren't major changes made in education, the social impact of the increased funding will not be the expected one. This is why the evaluation of all educational institutions, in order to pinpoint weaknesses and provide remedies -- and not because we want to punish anyone -- becomes an absolute necessity.

Relevant legislation is about to be introduced into the Greek Parliament. The bill proposes the establishment of an independent administrative body to oversee the evaluation procedures. The only connection of this Body to the Ministry of Education will be the Minister's proposal of a candidate for the Body's Chairman to the relevant Parliamentary Committee, taking into account the Committee's opinion before the appointment of the Chairman. The Ministry will also appoint the Board of Directors of the above Body. The Board of Directors will not conduct any evaluations itself, but will establish the preconditions for the evaluation procedure, with the collaboration of a series of experts in each field. It will also supervise both internal and external evaluation procedures.

The Board of Directors will be comprised of representatives from universities, technological institutes, research foundations, the job market and students. There will first be an internal evaluation in the Universities and relevant reports will be drafted. The above Evaluation Body, which will supervise the entire procedure, will review the reports and randomly appoint external evaluators, who will be selected by both the University Department involved and by the Body, and appoint an external expert who will not be Greek or work for any higher education institution in Greece. Through this process we will also provide our own University professors with the opportunity to participate in the evaluation of Universities in other countries. It is notable that some University Departments and other Institutions in Greece have already undergone evaluations, through their own initiative, by foreign institutions.

I have been trying for some time now to further explain to those few individuals who have reacted negatively to the prospect of evaluation -- because as we know anything new surprises and annoys some -- that the evaluation will produce the desired results. If the evaluation reveals that public institutions of higher education need more support, then the state will have to do its duty and provide such support. If the evaluation shows that there are weaknesses in the work or collaboration of the Universities then that will have to be corrected. Higher education institutions in Greece are funded by taxpayers' money and must be accountable to the Greek people--and I want to make this quite clear politically-- with regard to how this money is spent. It is incumbent not only upon the state to know what work the Universities do; it is also part of the sense of duty of all who work in higher education institutions. I don't think anyone can argue about this.

The second issue, which is clear if one examines the process of evaluation of universities in Great Britain, where evaluation began and encountered great opposition, is that it is absolutely necessary to continuously evaluate ourselves and do the best we can. We must keep in mind that society has entrusted higher education institutions with a particular mission, one that is focused on students.

In short, the educational infrastructure is there to serve the students and not to provide jobs for professors and teachers. Students are what matter most. And they have the right to get the best possible education and move on to where they want to work without delay, or pursue research or teaching, having acquired the necessary qualifications for their advancement. Students also must have official proof of what exactly they have learned. Consequently, there is no room for bureaucratic and other procedures, and that is why we fully agree with the diploma supplement that must be awarded by the higher education institutions.

Let's not forget that we have a long tradition of Greek scholars and scientists that have made a great name for themselves all over the world, and the more organized and collective the system in which they flourished, the more they managed to achieve. I say this without any intention to accuse the system in Greece for certain idiosyncrasies, but because many times important people with significant capabilities cannot create together the collective action that is needed. And this is evident not only in our country but elsewhere, too.

This overall effort is also founded on the fact that collective action can produce results that will prove beneficial to society itself, to the economy and to individuals.

In other words, we are talking about on-going, long-term development. Lifelong learning should also develop along these lines. Lifelong learning, at all levels, is not just a necessity, it is desirable for many other reasons -- personal and psychological reasons -- because it gives us the opportunity to upgrade our skills, do our job better, get a better job, respond to new circumstances, and exercise capabilities and skills we already have so we can reach our maximum potential. These are rights of every citizen. I believe that in the end, this great effort for quality assurance in higher education, and in all levels of education, truly constitutes an individual right for each and every citizen, those

attending higher education, as well as all members of our society who need these services. The quality of these services must be worthy of the efforts that the people and the state have been making during this time.

Therefore, another bill concerning lifelong learning will be submitted and discussed in the relevant Parliamentary Committee meeting next week. This will provide higher education institutions with the opportunity to develop lifelong learning programs – funded by the European Union – that are absolutely necessary, because we can see that a Bachelor's degree is not enough anymore and many times a Master's degree or even a Doctorate, in view of recent developments, is also not enough, and that everyone must be able to adjust to new developments.

In most countries of the world, education has been was a controversial issue ideologically... Education and educational policy is now a matter of science.

I personally believe, in my capacity as Minister of Education, that anyone who battles against scientific facts as well as common sense, is bound to fail, his policies are bound to fail, and the people assigned on these tasks are bound to fail. If we want to elaborate on this, I would say that execution of policy in general is an almost scientific matter, since in our times even the smallest mistake may have vast consequences, not only financial ones, and these negative consequences are two -fold. It is the things that have not been or cannot be done that can have a serious and negative impact on society as a whole.

We will therefore move ahead with the broadest possible consensus and after serious discussion in order to have the best possible results. Institutions of higher education in Greece have excellent human resources that are ready and willing to offer more, and they need better infrastructure, and better funding.

This year we increased funding for Universities by 18% and 24% for the Technological Institutes, while their activities expanded significantly. Many new departments were established in regional universities. Many of these do not yet meet our expectations, but substantial efforts are being made by all sides involved.

Eighty-one new University departments were established under the 3<sup>rd</sup> Community Support Framework, and now enjoy the full support of the Ministry, which established an additional seven departments in Universities and Technological Institutes, not because we believe that the Regions in Greece must be supported through Universities--that is a secondary goal--but because we believe that we must develop an academic environment everywhere, and because it is clear throughout Europe that not only large urban centers should be able to have Universities.

On the other hand, we have recently passed new laws and developed a new organization which will oversee the faster recognition of degrees and diplomas, something that had developed into a major problem in the last few years.

Our young people, provided they have received high quality education and have done relevant studies, have the right to have their degree recognized abroad, especially in the countries of the European Union and the developed world in general, through an automated, in a sense, system so that they do not waste much time before entering the job market.

In other words, ladies and gentlemen, the right to work, for which everyone seems to be interested in and is evident in all relevant research concerning our youth, is not directly dependent on educational policies but is connected to and created by academic rights. Therefore, the impact of bad education or good education on our society is vast. Corrective measures in education policies on the other hand, take a long time to bear results. That is why it is useful to always follow a

procedure of fruitful discussion.

Certainly there is much to be done in higher education, and we need the support of all those involved. We especially need more substantial participation of students, who unfortunately for Greek students, are not represented yet at European level due to internal disagreements. In other words, despite the fact that we have elections in the Universities, when it comes time for them to be 'politically' represented, they are unable to do so, that is, to participate through a representative of theirs on the National Council for Education or at the level of the European Union.

As Minister of Education I want to express my wish and hope that the necessary procedures will be put into place to have students represented in a way that will truly express what they really want, and more importantly what the majority of the students want. The majority of the students attend classes and vote, but their voices are not really heard at the broader level since students do not have official representation. It is under such procedures that we want to move ahead. This process may prove painful in the short term but it is clear that the majority of the Greek people and more importantly the majority of the University students and faculty want such a policy, one that does not jeopardize their future, one that does not change half-way through the process what has been foreseen, a policy, that is, that respects the personal and democratic rights of all our citizens and society.

I would like to salute this Conference and ask the organizing committee to provide our Ministry with the proceedings of the conference, because the most important aspect of democracy is continuous dialogue, especially when such dialogue is conducted at the level of objective scientific discourse, but there, as with all social dialogue, at the core of democracy is disagreement, as long as it is constructive and allows things to move ahead faster.

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank the Hellenic American University and the Hellenic American Union, a long-standing institution in Greece, for this particular initiative. I hope that many other groups undertake similar initiatives, just as they are beginning to be undertaken by the state universities in our country. The Ministry can benefit from new ideas and insight on how to proceed. What we are ultimately interested in is the content and power of the ideas, and not who says what, because no one person of course can know everything.

Ultimately, the important thing is what someone does right, or rather, whether something is done or not done right is important, and not who does it. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

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