

Inform, conform, reform and do not deform: A four axons' framework for the Hellenic academic institutions facing the Greek crisis challenge

Sir,

There have been several recent articles focusing on the Greek crisis and its effects on the Hellenic public health system^[1-3] or on the quality of the healthcare provided.^[4-7] Despite the fact that the consequences of an inadequately funded healthcare system are immediate, of major significance and undoubtedly directly linked to human losses, one should not neglect that there are other equivalently important consequences of the Greek crisis linked to equivalently crucial state-ensured "social goods". Among those social goods lies the one of higher education/training, primarily performed in Greece through government-funded academic institutions and research centers of excellence.

Since the first bailout request of the Hellenic government (2010), the austerity measures taken in order to please its international creditors (being the European Central Bank, the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund; "Troika") and improve the economy's perspective have resulted in: (a) a recruitment freeze in government research facilities and academic institutions, (b) a cut of the government's contributions to institutional research funding, (c) a research scientists' salary cut of approximately 20% and (d) a significant difficulty of the government to meet its commitments in contributing its expected 15% share to the funding obtained by Hellenic academic institutions from the European Commission's 7th Framework Programme.^[8,9] On top of these problems, Greece is now facing an unemployment figure of 25.1% (as of July 2012), political instability (Greece has been run by four different governmental schemes within the last 2 years) and several difficulties in the implementation of a new legislation concerning the reform of higher education, the overseeing of academic recruitment and the modernization of university governance.^[10]

We, herein, urge for the need of a framework that could provide a platform of action toward the elimination of the adverse effects that the established recession and funding deprivation have caused (and will probably continue to cause) on the functioning of the Hellenic academic institutions. As highlighted on this letter's title, we believe that a four axons' systematic action framework should be set forward by the Hellenic scientific community and the Greek government; this framework should: (a) encourage the extroversion toward the international scientific community (inform; to provide an exhaustive and systematic presentation of the effects that the Greek crisis has upon both teaching and research conducted within the country's academic institutions through every possible means, to seek for international support and collaborations as well as to encourage the suggestion of novel approaches toward the increase of teaching and research quality in parallel to a lowering of their cost), (b) enforce the compliance of the current academic practices with successful international administrative, teaching and research ones (conform; to adopt those international examples of academic excellence that could provide up-to-date academic training and research quality-ensurance and develop an integrated system of Total Quality Management), (c) adopt extensive structural changes and innovative practices (reform; to allow for extensive changes in the institutions' structure, the introduction of managerial practices in the governance of the Hellenic academic institutions as well as to provide the necessary legislation for the establishment of a more transparent system of institutional management) and (d) maintain the high standard of its excellence centers and prioritize the dedication of the country's academic institutions to provide high-quality academic education (do not deform; to ensure the viability of the country's excellence centers and their nonprofitable nature, reward its personnel's efforts and encourage the prioritization of academic teaching/training – the latter is, anyway, constitutionally established as the main scope of the Hellenic academic institutions).

We believe that the Greek crisis is an unfortunate fact that should be coped as an opportunity for the implementation of the above framework thus allowing the maintenance and improvement of the (already high) international standing^[11] and reputation of the Hellenic academic institutions.

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