

## **Greek science in danger**

On June 4, 2009, the newly appointed Minister of Development in a precipitous action published a press release announcing the forthcoming fundamental reorganization of the national research institutes in Greece. This plan was decided without consulting the National Research Council, thereby openly disregarding its institutional role.

This reorganization was introduced as a means of economizing on funds for research by merging institutes which are known by similar scientific names. The result will be the arbitrary establishment of monothematic research centres. Moreover, during his press conference, in an effort to manipulate the mass media, the Minister emphasized the potential in fund-saving which would derive from the reduction of the council members of the research centres from 192 to 66. He obviously ignored, or was unaware of, the fact that participation in these councils is not reimbursed, apparently confusing practices common in the private sector with those typical of research institutions.

Although research in Greece was never held in high esteem by the state, with a budget lower than 0.5% of the GNP (the lowest in Europe), the national research centres have succeeded since their foundation in achieving international recognition and acknowledgment as valuable partners among European laboratories. Greek research centres, among them the National Hellenic Research Foundation (NHRF), the National Centre of Scientific Research (Demokritos) and the National Centre of Social Research (EKKE) have risen to the occasion despite their humble budgets and have obtained sufficient funds from competitive European programmes. Owing to their labour and dynamism, they have managed to develop despite the fact that the grants allocated by the government are not even sufficient to pay the salaries of the researchers.

The plan of reorganization proposes the abolishment of the NHRF and the supplanting of its science institutes. It is of vital importance to underline that the scientific institutes of the NHRF which have just succeeded in organizing state-of-the-art laboratories thanks to external funding, are now obliged to pack up and be moved to “Demokritos” or elsewhere. EKKE is also to be abolished and merged with the humanities institutes of NHRF in a new research centre. In this way, the humane sciences are isolated and devalued. The National Documentation Centre (EKT) based in the NHRF is also to be exiled, although it has only recently constructed an expensive state-of-the-art infrastructure. Concerning “Demokritos”, the number of its institutes is to be reduced as a result of the fusion of laboratories which have quite diverse thematic missions, but according to the ministerial “experts” possess similar-sounding names.

The plan flies in the face of basic logic since the prohibitive cost of the proposed reinstallation will further exacerbate the economic crisis it allegedly seeks to remedy. The ministry intends to have the plan voted through the National Assembly during the summer session, counting on the demobilisation of the holiday period.

It is obvious that this will be fatal for the future of the research in Greece which survives thanks to international networks established by the researchers themselves. The construction of these networks is the fruit of long-term efforts which have distinguished the Greek research institutes at the international level. The paradox lies in the fact that the government is preparing to decimate the same entities whose utility and dynamism it had only recently underlined, based on evaluations conducted by international experts.

We fail to understand the logic behind the plan. Does it only seek to satisfy obscure, government-friendly interests? The Greek research community, the administrative councils and syndicates demand the immediate cancellation of this disastrous disorganisation plan. Instead, they advocate a national consultation in order to decide efficient strategies for the promotion and advancement of research in Greece, an essential component for the country's development.

The NHRF employees' Association