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Hellenic-Turkish Cooperation in Biopolitics

*Symposium organised by the Biopolitics International Organisation
under the auspices of the Ambassador of Turkey, Mr. Tahsin Burcuoglu*

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Governance with a vision of sustainability: Mayor Yilmaz Buyukersen, Governor Kadir Kocdemir, Professor Rusen Keles, Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis, and Governor Yusuf Erbay.



International cooperation in technology for the protection of bios: Professor Christos Zerefos, Professor Ioannis Tsoukalas, Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis, Professor Rusen Keles, and Dr. Meltem Yilmaz.



Corporate social responsibility - improving quality of life for all citizens: Stathis Nazos, Stephanos Costopoulos, Panayotis Koutsikos, Antonis Gortzis, Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis, and Anastasios Balafoutas.



Culture and education for sustainable development: Professor Berna Alpagut, Professor Gulsun Saglamer, Professor Constantine Stephanou, Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis, Professor Rusen Keles, and Professor Cemal Yukselen.

Civic leaders, business executives, eminent academics and other people of influence met in Athens on January 28 and 29 to discuss issues of international cooperation, environmental governance, corporate social responsibility, technology, culture and education, at a Symposium themed "Hellenic-Turkish Cooperation in Biopolitics." The Symposium was organised by the **Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.)**, under the auspices of the Ambassador of Turkey, **Tahsin Burcuoglu**. The aim of

the event, which was chaired by B.I.O. President Dr. **Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis** and by Ankara University Professor **Rusen Keles**, was to search for new models in education and social responsibility to improve quality of life for all citizens.

In her opening statement, Dr. **Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis** discussed the importance of Hellenic-Turkish events hosted by the Biopolitics International Organisation over the past 20 years and emphasised that the people who would be speaking at the present event are the people who formulate policy, the people who can make a difference in our world. This is important if we wish to assure the continuity of bios – life on our planet – and to place the environment at the heart of our thinking and action. New ethics, with the environment at the core of every endeavour, can help us to overcome negative stereotypes and build a truly civil society, where respect for all life will constitute the primary asset. In **promoting governance with a vision of sustainability**, B.I.O. has emphasised that a global effort in defence of the environment can enhance international understanding and inspire common action for environmental protection and peace. Through the **International University for the Bio-Environment**, which we launched in 1990, we have used environmental education to vaccinate society with new thinking. We are now ready with 15 new e-learning courses to place environmental education at the fingertips of every concerned citizen. **Corporate environmental responsibility** and a re-evaluation of the concept of profit has also been a priority for B.I.O. since 1985. We have held numerous conferences to sensitise business leaders to adopt environmentally and socially responsible strategies. We have also promoted the **“bio-assessment of technology”** in an effort to place ethics for the protection of all forms of life at the core of technology and policy. This is essential if we wish to create a society of vision and hope.

Professor **Rusen Keles** noted that the progress in Hellenic-Turkish relations in the past two decades is seen more and more clearly every day. The recent decision of the European Union to begin negotiations with Turkey towards full membership enforces the importance of this relationship, particularly as we search for sustainable living environments not only in our own countries but throughout Europe. Despite many pessimistic scenarios for the future of our environment, it seems that the era of pure development has been replaced by a new era of sustainable development creating new responsibilities for states and individuals. We should start by reducing expenditures allocated to military purposes in order to fund programs in cultural development, health and education, eradication of poverty, and the protection of the environment. As rightly observed by 2004 Nobel Prize Laureate Kenyan Minister Wangari Maathai, “Peace on earth depends on our capacity to protect our living environment.” We have every reason to expect that B.I.O., too, will be awarded similar prizes in the near future for its contribution to the well-being and prosperity of present and future generations. We must continue to motivate all individuals and governments around the world to work through international cooperation. It is the energy, dedication, and commitment of the participants of this event that will facilitate these goals.

Governance with a vision of sustainability

In presenting his views on the development of governance and policy which respect the environment and promote sustainable development, Dr. **Kadir Kocdemir**, Governor of Elazig, stressed that, aside from the economic, environmental, security, and cultural impacts, globalisation is also affecting the way governments rule in the 21st century. Globalisation has reduced the importance of borders, yet governments are still constrained by national boundaries. Like most aspects of society, governance must become globalised as well and alternative governance models should be developed to address transborder issues. Countries must accept their inter-dependence and adjust the systems of the state to include international cooperation. This is particularly important for managing environmental problems that cross national borders, such as depletion of the ozone layer and loss of biodiversity. The objective of global governance is to co-ordinate the governing services of the different actors at the various political, regional, and global levels through strong transborder relations. Global governance will play an important part in ensuring the sustainability of our environment.

Dr. **Yusuf Erbay**, Governor of the region of Yalova, emphasised that the basic principle of transfrontier cooperation is to create links and contractual relations in frontier areas so that joint solutions may be found for similar problems. This can be particularly important in the area of environmental protection. Experience throughout Europe has shown that cooperation between local and regional authorities can make it easier to carry out tasks effectively and can contribute to the improvement and development of frontier regions. A recent study conducted in Turkey has concluded that the local authorities along the borders of Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria are open to and are seeking transfrontier cooperation, especially in the area of environmental protection in order to address common problems and find common

solutions. We must strive to promote transfrontier cooperation if we are to successfully protect our natural environment.

Professor **Yilmaz Buyukersen**, Mayor of Eskisehir and Founder of the Turkish Open University, noted that, with regard to the bio-environment and biopolicy, the true cooperation between Turkey and Greece has two bases. One of these is to activate the potential of our educational institutions effectively and the other one is the collaboration of our governments in relation to the European Union and on other international platforms. All these combined solutions will help our countries to project and finance needs in order for our local and regional authorities to stop the ongoing environmental destruction. With regard to education, the starting point of the path we are going to follow is to bring together the Ministers of Education and authorities of higher education of both countries through the Biopolitics International Organisation.

Corporate social responsibility – improving quality of life for all citizens

Untrammelled economic growth has led to a crisis in values which obscures our priorities for the future. For environmental protection strategies to be effective, it is essential to have the participation of all stakeholders in society, including increased participation of business interests. **Stephanos Costopoulos**, Chairman of the American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce, highlighted the fact that successful businesses no longer rely on the production of perfect products or perfect services, but include environmental, social, and cultural dimensions in their strategy. As society increasingly expects corporations to act socially responsibly, the business community should address issues of concern through a collective effort. The successful implementation of corporate social responsibility requires a voluntary and complete application, including a modern perception of management and administration, with the goal to achieve a balance between economic development and social prosperity. More companies will become socially responsible as they become aware of the strategic and competitive advantages in implementing environmental policies.

Stathis Nazos, Executive Director of Aspis International MFMC, also stressed the importance of corporate social responsibility and raised the question of how a particular business can look beyond its self-interest and promote a socially responsible image. Measures have to be developed to prove to businesses that it is actually in their own self-interest to contribute to society. Such measures can include tax credits in the range of 2% to 5%, which could benefit a business' bottom line. We all need to think of incentives to help private enterprise move in the right direction.

Antonis Gortzis, General Secretary of the Piraeus Chamber of Commerce, emphasised that, in the beginning of the 21st century, entrepreneurship is called upon to revive the economy and contribute to social cohesion. To achieve sustainable targets, the business world must view corporate social responsibility as its chief concern. Corporate social responsibility is our responsibility towards our fellow human beings – be they workers, consumers or investors – towards the environment, towards our cultural heritage and society as a whole. Corporate social responsibility is hence a key factor for a successful business strategy, based on the rational use of natural resources and the prevailing socio-economic parameters and conditions. Another major component of corporate social responsibility is business ethics, based on concepts such as reliability, transparency, discipline, and quality. To achieve these goals, the Institute of Business Ethics was recently founded in Greece with the aim of raising awareness of corporate social responsibility in the private as well as the public sector.

Anastasios Balafoutas, Chairman of the Hellenic-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry, addressed the issue of reduced packaging as one of the most important areas of corporate environmental management. German companies adopted measures for reducing, recycling and reusing packaging materials even before a relevant Directive was issued by the European Commission. The obligation of Greek and European businesses to adopt packaging reduction schemes also arises from increased consumer environmental awareness, whereby consumers endorse or reject products and companies based on environmental considerations. The Hellenic-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry has been involved in environmental issues in Greece and Germany by promoting and supporting the transfer of know-how in environmentally friendly technologies and energy production, and by promoting integrated solutions in waste management. Through its web portal www.b2brenenergy.com, the Chamber has also launched a project promoting e-commerce in renewable energy sources. The aim of the project is to provide the exchange of information and know-how in all areas concerning renewable energy sources.

Panayotis Koutsikos, Chairman of the Hellenic-Turkish Chamber of Commerce, emphasised that, in the previous decade, trade between Greece and Turkey was very limited. Beginning in 1999, the political relationship between the two countries acquired new and better dynamics, thanks to the efforts of the Foreign Ministers of both countries. Bilateral policy targeted the economic sectors, which led to the signing of nine agreements regarding enterprise interests and the mutual rejection of double taxation between the two countries. This productive political climate and the combination of all of these decisions resulted in a huge increase in the total trade between the two countries and in extensive Greek investments in Turkey. The maintenance of the good political climate between the two countries will contribute to further growth in economic relations.

International cooperation in technology for the protection of bios

Technology with a vision can improve quality of life for all citizens. Yet presently, as Professor **Ioannis Tsoukalas**, General Secretary of Research and Technology, pointed out, technology has become a mechanism for the imposition of interests. This mechanism, however, does not take into consideration the interests of modern humanity. The developmental model we have espoused destroys the environment and natural resources, leading to instability for the entire planet. As we are developing a knowledge society, where every individual will be technologically literate, it is essential to pay attention to the ethical issues involved, that is how technology is perceived by each citizen. Science and technology gives us development and wealth. The question is, at what cost? This is not a philosophical or abstract question. It is very specific and applies to our everyday lives. I commend and support the Biopolitics International Organisation and every organisation that aims at mobilising society to deal with issues that affect us all.

Professor **Christos Zerefos** from the University of Athens presented some critical facts concerning atmospheric pollution and stressed the importance of international cooperation for the abatement and prevention of atmospheric pollution. During the last 30 years, methane and carbon dioxide emissions have increased by 15%, while the ozone layer has decreased by 10%. Although most powerful nations acknowledge the many dangers involved, they place economic development before emissions control. An important area of cooperation between Greece and Turkey can be the application of free radical technology in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Free radicals are present in areas of the planet with lots of sunlight, such as the Mediterranean. Sunlight breaks down water vapour and releases hydroxyl radicals. These radicals can attack greenhouse gases, such as methane, and convert them into inert substances. This technology will be particularly important after 2008, when greenhouse gas emissions will be fined with 50 to 100 US dollars a ton by the Kyoto protocol.

Sustainable architecture was the issue addressed by Dr. **Meltem Yilmaz** from the Department of Interior Architecture and Environmental Design at Hacettepe University. She mentioned that architecture in the 20th century has played a big role in exploiting natural resources and fossil fuels, causing pollution and instability in our environment. Most assume that cars and factories cause the most environmental damage, when in fact buildings consume more than half the energy used world-wide through lighting, heating and cooling. Architectural design and construction in the past has not taken the natural environment and conditions into account. Architectural design must integrate environmental technology, resource conservation, and the aesthetic content. We must improve architectural study programmes to include an understanding of the environment in relation to building design in order to create a sustainable future.

In discussing the need for clean energy sources, Professor **Hunay Evliya**, Dean of Environmental Studies at Cukurova University, mentioned that, for decades, people have tried to achieve more of everything: more mobility, more comfort and more consumption. The signs are becoming increasingly evident that this cannot go on forever; too much pressure is put on the environment and natural resources are becoming exhausted. The new target is to change this tendency from "more" to "better," from quantity to quality. The antagonism between man and the environment should be replaced by the notion that man is a part of the environment too. As demand for energy increases so does the need to take care of the environment. Developing and deploying more efficient and environmentally friendly energy technology is critical to achieving the objectives of energy security, environmental protection, and economic growth and social development.

Culture and Education for Sustainable Development

In addressing the issue of internationalising higher education, Professor **Gulsun Saglamer**, f. Rector of Istanbul Technical University, emphasised that, in order to respond to the challenge of globalisation, higher educational institutions must become more international. Knowledge is the driving force of all aspects of the global economy. This will create many opportunities but will also increase the knowledge gap between nations. Internationalising higher education is much more than establishing programmes in international relations, foreign languages, history and culture. It refers to how an institution will compete with a foreign institution, with its pool of local students, professors, standards in educational curricula, and quality and management in the global higher education market. Enhancing the capacity of institutions for internationalisation may differ from institution to institution depending on structure, value systems, and resources. Yet all higher education institutions will have to address the internationalisation of education, research, and services to society in order to compete in the global education market.

Professor **Berna Alpagut** from the University of Ankara, noted that, in order to encourage a new societal culture based on the protection and development of all values of life – bio-culture – we must reach all members of the public. Museums are an ideal solution as institutions that provide life-long training and education to people of all ages. City museums in particular protect the characteristics of a city and represent the common memory of a city. They depict cities in terms of history, geography, politics, the environment and economics. City museums provide a more direct environmental education than other museum types by delivering information about the natural environment and the values for life. A city museum plays an important role in the forming of bio-culture by improving the values that support the natural environment.

Professor **Cemal Yukselen**, Vice Rector of Mustafa Kemal University, discussed the importance of environmental considerations in the social sciences. Biopolicy-oriented education and training programmes should be introduced into existing curricula, particularly in the field of business administration. We should redefine the concept of profit and show the importance of corporate social responsibility. In discussing the importance of productivity, we should include discussions on the protection of the environment and natural resources. In feasibility studies, the cost of quality of life and the protection of the environment should be given consideration. We need to cooperate on a well-planned and aggressive strategy for future generations. We should provide an interdisciplinary programme leading to a new generation of business specialists with environmental values.

Professor **Constantine Stephanou**, Director of International European Studies at Panteion University, mentioned that, at the international level, the most important work regarding environmental governance is the outcome of the interplay between civil society, business and some aspects of the public sector. Furthermore, there have been several multi-stakeholder partnerships dedicated to sustainable development. Corporate leaders view the threat of further regulation especially traditional command and control type potential to hope as having the potential to hobble them in international competition. They prefer to adopt voluntary mechanisms to avoid legal liability and which preserve their flexibility in the face of rapidly changing technologies and markets.