

BIOPOLITICS INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION

Hellenic–Turkish Cooperation in Biopolitics

On the Road to European Union Ideals

Symposium organised by the Biopolitics International Organisation

under the auspices of the Ambassador of Turkey

Athens, 9 February 2004

Press Release

Civic leaders, business executives, scholars and diplomats from Greece and Turkey met in Athens, on February 9, 2004, to discuss important issues in international cooperation. The initiative was themed “Hellenic-Turkish Cooperation in Biopolitics – On the Road to European Union Ideals” and was organised by the President and Founder of the Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.), **Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis**, under the auspices of H.E. the Ambassador of Turkey, Mr. **Yigit Alpogan**. The meeting convened with great success at the **Office of the European Parliament** and the **National Bank of Greece**.

Following the success of previous conferences and symposia in Istanbul (1992), Ankara (1997), Trabzon (1989, 1993), Adana (1995) and Athens (1990), which focused on Hellenic-Turkish cooperation and strengthened the friendship between the two countries, B.I.O. hosted the present event in an attempt to promote bio-diplomacy, education, and environmental governance as the needed vision for the future. Threats to the environment are international problems, and the required solutions entail collaboration and understanding among all nations. A global effort in defence of the environment can enhance international understanding and inspire common action for environmental protection and peace. The role of culture, education and policy with respect for the environment are crucial in making the world a safer and more equitable place.

During the **morning session** at the **Office of the European Parliament**, B.I.O. President **Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis** thanked Ambassador Alpogan for his support and expressed the hope that the meeting would provide a forum for the promotion of dialogue and cooperation in the most consequential task, that of preserving the environment and bios – life – on our planet. “Arrogance and disrespect have led humanity to the edge of a cliff. International cooperation and bio-diplomacy, as proposed since 1985 by B.I.O., can inspire a new vision in society and lead to a future of hope. 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.”

George Cassimatis, Director of the European Parliament Representation in Greece, hailed B.I.O.’s initiative and highlighted the importance of the meeting within the framework of the general spirit of Hellenic-Turkish friendship and cooperation. He

also highlighted the international character of environmental problems and the need for cooperation between Greece and Turkey in finding solutions. Finally, he explained that modern Greece has benefited greatly from European integration and wished Turkey every success.

The Ambassador of Turkey, **Yigit Alpogan**, thanked the B.I.O. President and the Director of the European Parliament Representation, and expressed his appreciation of the devoted efforts of the Biopolitics International Organisation, which he considers a noble cause. As a diplomat, he highlighted the importance of the meeting and noted that Greece and Turkey have enjoyed very fruitful relations over the last five years. “Turkey has been assisted by Greece in complex and complicated EU matters, and there has been extensive collaboration in many and diverse fields within the framework of the European Union. There is a sustained process of negotiations between the two countries, in order to resolve past differences, and, once both sides are ready to overcome dividing issues, bilateral relations will improve and there will hardly be any issue left for politicians or technocrats to ponder over. In the field of business, tax cuts have created new opportunities for the business communities in both countries. In the field of the environment, universities are developing many and diverse joint projects. This event is an example of the constructive cooperation between the two countries. Biopolitics is a very modern and new science, and the Turkish scientific community will have a lot to gain from it.”

Professor Rusen Keles, leading scholar and diplomat and distinguished B.I.O. Trustee and founding member, remarked that, thanks to the dedication and outstanding leadership of its President and Founder, the Biopolitics International Organisation has expanded to include 124 countries. “When the UN Commission on Environment and Development, headed by f. Norwegian Prime Minister Brundtland, made public its discovery of the method of sustainable development in 1986, we, as the founders of B.I.O, were already discussing its implications for our nations in Athens. When the first B.I.O. Hellenic-Turkish meeting took place in 1990, the UN Summit in Rio de Janeiro had not yet happened. It is not too unrealistic now to express the hope that the next Hellenic-Turkish symposium will take place at a time when both Greece and Turkey appear as full members of the European Union. With all these considerations in mind, I believe that our generation is faced with an important ethical responsibility for ensuring respect for all the biotic and non-biotic elements on Earth, and that B.I.O will continue to contribute in the future, as in the past, to the happiness of the peoples in our region and in the entire world.”

The Governor of Edirne, **Fahri Yucel**, focused on the significance of Hellenic-Turkish cooperation in environmental protection and water management, issues of primary concern in cross-border collaboration projects. He noted that it is particularly important to develop a network between the two countries to coordinate efforts and promote cooperation in tourism and development. “In the framework of national decisions and arrangements, the participation of local and regional actors, universities and NGOs in environmental decision-making is important. Our shared geography requires cross-border cooperation. I believe that the Biopolitics International Organisation and meetings such as this will make a vital contribution to our work in this field.”

The Governor of Sivas, **Hasan Canpolat**, expressed his great pleasure to be in Athens and his certainty that the meeting would be very helpful in promoting Turkish-Hellenic cooperation. He also thanked the Biopolitics International Organisation and congratulated its President for organising such a successful meeting on a very important subject. “The environment is a very complex and fragile issue, so it is not very easy to develop environmental policies and apply them effectively in the real world. In many cases there is enough will but not a large enough budget or the regional capacity required to apply efficient environmental policies. To accelerate matters, it is necessary to search for coordination and technical support mechanisms on an international level.”

Panayotis Koutsikos, Chairman of the Hellenic-Turkish Chamber of Commerce, noted that commercial relations between Greece and Turkey have greatly improved over the past four years. “In 1999, business transactions between the two countries totalled 200 million dollars and reached 1.2 billion dollars by 2003. The signing of a treaty cancelling double taxation further enhanced commercial relations. However, economic development is inadvertently related to environmental problems. The diplomatic communities of both countries, together with the Biopolitics International Organisation, could cooperate in the organisation of seminars to inform industrialists and business executives on how to avoid development practices that harm the environment.”

The Mayor of Antakya, **Iris Senturk**, emphasised that culture transcends national borders. “In both government and private enterprise, there is no problem that cannot be solved once cooperation has been achieved. Cooperation among nations reaches beyond boundaries. Closer cooperation between Greece and Turkey will benefit both peoples. Elected officials, ambassadors and government agents can all work together to achieve this goal. Let’s come together and get to know each other. Good cooperation can help us to move ahead. This year, Antakya is a candidate for the ‘Peace in the World’ award. When people have decided to work together in a common cause, there is no obstacle that cannot be overcome.”

Professor Constantine Stephanou of the Department of International and European Studies at Panteion University, emphasised that the present meeting constitutes an appropriate and timely initiative for both countries, which have worked hard over the recent years to create a positive climate and to resolve their political differences. “Greece and Turkey are partners in meeting environmental challenges. The European Union framework is very valuable for both countries, which should work together in resolving international environmental problems and in implementing international conventions and treaties, such as those concerning transboundary pollution.”

Professor Nicholas Markatos, f. Rector of the National Technical University of Athens, expressed his support of the B.I.O. initiative to enrich the Olympic Games with concepts other than athletics, including concern for people with disabilities and environmental issues. “Pollution is an international problem and provides fertile ground for the development of bio-diplomacy. Technology is neither good nor evil. Globalisation entails the problems of expansionism and, to counter this threat, a new culture and way of life above and beyond technology are needed. The cooperation

between Greece and Turkey is vital in this effort, and Greek-Turkish friendship is something to which I fully ascribe.”

University of Ankara **Professor Berna Alpagut**, highlighted the importance of bio-education as a bridge of cooperation between all peoples of the world. She also highlighted the importance of museums in the preservation of our natural and cultural heritage and in the promotion of a biocentric education. “The Biopolitics International Organisation, through its e-learning programmes, can bring Greek and Turkish scientists together in collaboration. It is a great pleasure to be participating in this Hellenic-Turkish symposium, and I would like to thank Ambassador Alpogan, Dr. Vlavianos-Arvanitis and Professor Keles for their timely initiative.”

Professor Zafer Erturk, Rector of East Mediterranean University, an institution with over 35,000 students, remarked that an open European area for higher learning carries a wealth of positive perspectives, which respect diversity but which also require a continuous effort to remove barriers and to develop a framework for teaching and learning that enhances close cooperation. “There are numerous projects that could be implemented, and we could all work together to create a better future for environmental education. A new understanding for cooperation in environmental education is needed. We all are on the same road for a new and better world.”

Professor Umit Erdem, Director of Environmental Studies at Ege University in Izmir, focused on the importance of Hellenic-Turkish friendship and thanked Greece for supporting Turkey’s EU candidacy. As Vice Director of the European Ecological Federation (EEF), he expressed the hope that the two countries will cooperate closely in environmental protection projects. “Anti-life and ad hoc activities have created a wave of extinction in biotic communities. An extinction of habitats by ten to one means an annihilation of biota by 50%. Land degradation in this sense is ‘ecocide’ and needs to be considered a crime. Agrotourism is an alternative activity in the rural development process, which combines agriculture and tourism, improves natural resources, and contributes to the rural area both socially and economically. The introduction of agricultural activities in urban areas is a way to educate urban people in the contribution of agriculture to quality of life and the economy.”

Istanbul University **Professor Ersi Abaci Kalfoglu** focused on the importance of international cooperation in organised crime prevention. She noted that, within the framework of European integration, Greece and Turkey can work together to combat crime and improve quality of life. “Via education, universities in both countries can be key players in this endeavour, and international cooperation can be maximally beneficial. This cooperation is a potential reserve for the future of the region. Understanding through education can help to overcome even the most negative stereotypes. In fact, cooperation at every level is the only solution to enable us to strengthen peace.”

Professor İlhami Unver, from the University of Ankara, thanked the Biopolitics International Organisation and the Embassy of Turkey for their generous hospitality and declared his great pleasure to be visiting Athens, the cradle of civilisation. He also discussed the importance of soil protection in environmental preservation efforts, emphasising that healthy soil provides clean air and water, bountiful crops and forests,

productive rangeland, diverse wildlife, and beautiful landscapes, and, therefore, maintaining productive soils is critical. “The environment does not discriminate along national boundaries. We have the desire and energy to cooperate to prevent further environmental deterioration and we are very pleased that the 2004 Olympic Games will be held in Athens.”

A society of culture, education, and sportsmanship

At the conclusion of the morning session, Olympic champion **Christos Papanikolaou**, declared that Greek Olympic champions fully support the Biopolitics International Organisation, a global effort in defence of the environment. “We support your struggle for a new society, based on models of education and sportsmanship. We would therefore like to propose a meeting of Greek and Turkish Olympic champions, cultural agents and business leaders, to be held under the B.I.O. auspices in view of the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. We would also like to ask the Ambassador of Turkey to place this initiative under his aegis. In this way, we hope that we can further promote the ideals of Biopolitics for a better environment and a society of culture, education and sportsmanship.”

The Symposium’s **afternoon session** convened at the **National Bank of Greece** with the participation of many distinguished speakers. Discussions were chaired by B.I.O. President, **Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis**, and **Professor Rusen Keles**, and focused on the following themes: International cooperation and bio-diplomacy; Environmental education; Business and the media; Agriculture and rural development; An environmental vision in governance.

The session opened with an exchange of ideas on the pivotal role of bio-diplomacy as a vehicle for international cooperation and peace. On behalf of the Chairman and CEO of the Hellenic Telecommunications Organisation, **Lefteris Antonacopoulos**, Chief Technology Officer and Hellas Sat Chairman, **George Argyropoulos**, congratulated the B.I.O. President for her vision and tireless efforts for a better future for all, and emphasised that Biopolitics helps in the creation and expression of the common interests of nations by replacing confrontation with cooperation. “In today’s world, characterised by complexity and interaction, telecommunications are of vital importance for the development of a healthy environmental conscience. In this context, rapid exchange of information and ideas reinforces and shapes this participatory procedure to the benefit of the environment. By applying all its forces and acknowledging current trends, the Hellenic Telecommunications Organisation is adopting “bio-environmentally friendly” actions in the fields of education, employment and culture.”

OTEnet Managing Director, **George Ioannidis**, highlighted that Biopolitics can help society to overcome selfish and short-sighted attitudes in favour of a long-term strategy of environmental harmony and hope. “Humanity is intricately related to the environment, and progress can only be achieved if we respect the environment. This realisation can help us to support a better social and working environment and lead to conditions of maximum social profit. Bio-diplomacy, the section of biopolitics dealing with environmental protection through the diplomatic route, is a

commendable endeavour. The internet can bring bio-diplomacy to every citizen on the planet and raise awareness of the problems of the physical environment that are common to all and can unite humanity. The internet can facilitate mutual understanding for joint action to meet our common challenges.”

Deputy Mayor of Athens, **Professor Kelly Bourdara**, greeted the participants on behalf of the Mayor and noted that, in the quest of a new vision in public administration, quality of life, hope and harmony are the building blocks of the environment that we should wish to achieve. “Athens is a city with great responsibility. The past, alone, without a good strategy for the present and a vision for the future, cannot lead to the changes we desire. Today, the present is enriched by this meeting, and we would like to work closely with all the participants in the quest for hope and peace. The 2004 Olympic Games are a great moment for our city. In the context of Olympic values, we would like to warmly support today’s meeting of cooperation. The environment, as promoted by the Biopolitics International Organisation, can become the core of a balanced and hopeful society.”

Alejandro Diaz, Ambassador of Mexico, expressed his gratitude to the B.I.O. President for hosting this event, and for the close cooperation she has developed during the last year with several universities in Mexico, which she has provided with ample and valuable educational material. “Mexico, is committed to enhancing environmental protection fully aware of the challenges concerning sustainable development, such as clean water management, forest protection, sound agricultural practices, responsible trade, implementation of renewable energy sources, care of wetlands, effective pollution control and also the promotion of ecotourism. There are many treaties written and signed for a better world, but with two minor inconveniences: developing countries lack the capabilities, the money and the will to enforce the agreements; and, some developed nations evade their responsibilities by not ratifying important treaties. In that case, diplomacy has to intervene to find wise solutions to common problems, and restore international cooperation. Solutions exist and it is up to us to identify them and to put them into practice through bio-diplomacy.”

Jannie Momberg, Ambassador of South Africa, thanked Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis for her tremendous enthusiasm for Biopolitics and for her dedication, and focused on the great progress achieved by South Africa in the area of environmental protection over the last decade. “South Africa became free in 1994 and inherited a vast legacy of poverty and crime, but a lot has been achieved since then. Of the 11 million people without clean water, today more than 9 million have access to water. In September 2002 we hosted a very successful World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. We were proud that our young democracy was given such a huge responsibility and we were pleased when the whole world said ‘well done’. We know that without sustainable development we will not survive. May this symposium further enhance the growing strength of the relationship between the Hellenic Republic and Turkey and may this be a building block for a better life for all.”

Nicholas Papageorgiou, President of the Hellenic National Commission for UNESCO, noted that, in order to preserve the environment in the manner in which the

Biopolitics International Organisation envisages, technology and the arts need to join forces and contribute to a society of peace. “In many areas throughout the planet, peace remains fragile. Poverty and conflict endanger human safety and dignity, as well as human justice. The attempt to maintain peace in all dimensions is a continuous challenge for the international community, especially under the conditions of globalisation. We have an obligation to make various efforts to find better and more adequate ways to deal with these multiple challenges. This search must be based on universally shared values, while preserving the uniqueness of individuals and civilizations, and must aim at the urgent needs of the less privileged and isolated groups or geographical regions. Firmly bound to democracy, human rights, and basic freedoms, the key to this search is dialogue, as it is only through dialogue that long-term understanding and peace may be achieved.”

Professor **Christos Halkias**, Dean of Studies at the Athens Information Technology Center, remarked that, following the problems created by our permissive and consumer societies, what we really need is a ‘good society.’ “In order to create a good society we must accept the following principles: Real fulfilment in life will come from striving with all of our physical and spiritual might for a worthwhile objective that helps others, that is larger than our self-interest. We must also use our education, talent, and energy to build a world community that considers knowledge a gift to be shared, a healthy planet a place to be cherished, and human dignity and opportunity fundamental conditions to be enjoyed by all people. To achieve this goal, we need creative ideas, high technology infrastructure, risk capital and passion.”

Stefanos Costopoulos, Chairman of the American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce, noted that, as Turkey prepares itself for EU membership, it is eligible for a variety of funds to upgrade infrastructure, the environment and its financial systems. “Greece, as an EU member, has the experience of knowing the hows and whys of many of these programmes. The United States also offers know-how that is very often the best available. The current level of trade between Greece and Turkey is 800 million dollars and will soon reach 1 billion dollars. We believe that this level could increase by another 20%, if more synergies are created so that Greece and Turkey become not only trading partners, but trading hubs, transport hubs, and tourism hubs. This can constitute a significant step toward promoting Southeast Europe, and giving credibility to a region that deserves the serious attention of foreign investors.”

ABN AMRO Asset Management CEO, **Stathis Nazos**, discussed the role of the media and business as reflectors of societal values. “The media disseminate information to the public. Their primary objective is to present unbiased information. How can this be achieved? Only if there is a true separation of the media and business. A true separation of the media and business promotes social welfare. In order to enforce this separation, appropriate sets of rules have to be applied, rules that are cross-country, cross border, and independent of cultural biases.”

Constantine Kanonis, Chairman of the Hellenic-Russian Chamber of Commerce, emphasised that, in the past, environmental considerations were not taken into account by financial institutions. This is why present society is neither as civilised as we imagine nor as healthy as we think. “For many decades we have financed pollution. International organisations have been more responsive with respect to the bio-

environment than commercial banks. Today, all international organisations require environmental compliances and assurances for every project they finance. This is true for the World Bank Group, the International Finance Cooperation, EBRD and Co others. On the 1st of January 1997, a group of 93 commercial banks formed and signed a declaration on the environment and the sustainable development. I am very proud that my bank, the Commercial Bank of Greece, or Emporiki Bank, has joined, following my suggestion, this visionary group of banks.”