

9 January 2014

We need investment in education to overcome the financial crisis – the Rectors' Conferences of Greece and Germany meet in Athens

On 8 and 9 January 2014, representatives of the Greek Rectors' Conference (Synodos Prytaneon Ellinikon Panepistimion) and the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) held their first meeting to discuss future collaboration between their two organisations. The consequences of the financial crisis for the Greek higher education institutions were the key theme.

The representatives agreed to have the overall situation analysed in detail by experts. In particular, ways will be sought in which political decisions can be made on an objective basis and thus encourage the Greek and the German governments to offer the public higher education sector in Greece appropriate support. In two consecutive conferences, the representatives of the German and Greek higher education institutions will work towards

- extending and intensifying partnerships between the German and the Greek higher education institutions,
- increasing the number of joint research projects,
- designing joint degree programmes for both Greek and German students and
- encouraging student exchanges.

This dialogue will form the basis of a memorandum of understanding between the two Rectors' Conferences which will be signed at a next meeting, which will take place on Rhodes.

Prof. Demosthenes Anagnostopoulos, Rector of Harokopio University and Chairman of the Greek Rectors' Conference, said "I find that our meeting today with our German colleagues has been extremely important, particularly at a time at which not only Greek society, but also Greek higher education institutions are facing challenges. I therefore welcome the confidence that the German universities have shown in the strength of their Greek partners. The Greek universities will draw strength from the knowledgeable and trusting dialogue between the representatives of the higher education institutions in both countries. This supports our call to remove the Greek universities from the existing memorandum obligations to the Troika, so that education can become the most effective development engine with which to overcome the financial crisis.."

HRK Vice-President Prof. Dieter Lenzen said: "The situation in the Greek higher education institutions is dramatic: budget and staff cuts of up to 50%, both in the academic and administrative areas and with student numbers rising at the same time. All of this is making normal operations practically impossible in many areas. Investment in education is the best social policy. Our next meeting will seek to provide expertise that will convey this important point to the public effectively. Furthermore, it is important to communicate to the German

public a true image of the capability of the Greek universities and thus widen interest in collaboration and convey to the Greek public that German academics and universities are supporting them in the current situation. Greece is the birthplace of the European idea. Europe is therefore particularly obliged to protect the Greek higher education system, parts of which are still young, from collapse and to ensure that the younger generation in Greece has a future."