



## DR. DAVID GREEN

### The Education Debate “E=F3-1”

Just when I thought the situation in Greek education couldn't become any more chaotic, the new Minister of National Education, Mr Aris Spiliotopoulos, has invited all and sundry to join an orgy of dialoguery ("Stirring up secondary school", 8 Feb.). It has all the hallmarks of British prime minister James Callaghan's "Great Education Debate" which turned out to be a waste of time and effort. Callaghan's major achievement turned out to be reducing the size of toilet cisterns – about which he was demonstrably flushed - and his tactic of using education to stave off electoral defeat didn't work either. He lost both the debate and the general election to Mrs Thatcher, who subsequently transformed education by training teachers and academics as education managers. I was fortunate to be one of them!

To be effective, education must be Fair, Flexible and Felicitous (E=F3) but not necessarily Free (E=F3-1). Of course, Greek parents pay more per capita for secondary education than other parents in EU countries but I for one would never criticise them for making such a long-term investment. An increasing number of parents now pay tuition fees in both private and state universities here (eg for postgraduate courses) and the introduction of tuition fees in all Greek universities cannot be long delayed for two main reasons: firstly, Greece cannot afford to invest a higher percentage of GDP in university education than it does at present; and secondly, the fees paid by rich parents will have to be used to support the children of low income families at university in what promises to be a long-term recession here in Europe. In short, you can't have a higher education system which is both fair and free.

As for E=F3 (education as fair, flexible and felicitous), I cannot for the life of me understand why Mr Spiliotopoulos has chosen to launch his great education debate on university entrance when Greek universities face the major challenge of entering - or not entering - the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) next year (2010). Greece has also signed up to Bologna 3-5-8 (3 years to the first diploma, 5 to a Master's and 8 to a Doctorate), which will provide one of the criteria for being an EHEA member, and yet I see no hard evidence that Greek universities are being prepared to take part in this great, pan-European, third level project.

All university entrance requirements need to be continually revised but the current Greek system is no worse nor better than any other current system in Europe. From what I've seen of its operational fitness-for-purpose (its felicitousness), it is both fair and flexible. Any movement to return to the status quo ante, which Prof Babiniotis seems to favour, should be strongly resisted. The final decision on who should enter university cannot be left exclusively to university staff - and I base that statement in part on my 42-year experience as an academic and academic manager. Why try and fix what isn't broken?

The root problem in Greek secondary education is, as Prof Veremis has rightly diagnosed, its curriculum and teaching methodologies; however, to change and reform these elements will take more than 6 months and a completely different structural approach. To cut a long exposition short, I would propose the formation of an Hellenic Curriculum and Examinations Council (CEC) to look at what needs to be changed in the secondary school curriculum and how the teachers chosen to deliver it need to be trained and supported. I was a member of a CEC in the UK and saw that it worked. It was independent of government, unions and universities but had representatives of all three in its various curriculum committees. It prepared courses of study and examinations (eg GCE "A" levels) which were multi-functional. These examinations were not

merely for university entrance but also for entrance into the public service, industry and commerce.

As an old academic myself, I completely share Prof Veremis' reservations about the current tactic of dialoguery (my term). In my experience, tactical approaches of this kind are determined by short-term political considerations and are seldom efficacious, ie of any benefit to pupils and students. Students are often successful in spite of a particular education system rather than because of it. That said, we European students, parents, academics and policy-makers have at last the opportunity to get our education systems fit-for-purpose in preparation for the imminent launch of the European Higher Education Area next year. Greek universities must have an important role to play in the EHEA but, in order to take their place alongside other universities, the Minister of National Education needs to facilitate their entry by implementing the recent rulings of the European Court of Justice on professional and university qualifications - if necessarily, after the upcoming European elections! Education, in the final analysis, must be fair, flexible and felicitous for all European students, not just for those who carry a particular political party card.

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