

George Stephanopoulos and the “Institute of Chemical Engineering” in Patras, Greece

Comments by George N. Papatheodorou;

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In the impressive CV of George Stephanopoulos I would like to add what I consider a special relation that George had with both the Department of Chemical Engineering at the University of Patras (DCEUP) and the Institute of Chemical Engineering Science (ICE-HT / FORTH) in Patras, Greece.

In the fall of 1981 the late Alkiviades Payatakes introduced me to George Stephanopoulos. It was the time that Alkis, Costas Vayenas and myself had left our positions in the US and returned to Greece to work in and build the new DCEUP. Practically there was no infrastructure in the new Department (no labs, no offices no teaching faculty). George, who a year earlier had left University of Minnesota to assume a Chair at the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA), encouraged us to stay and start something new “*apart from the bureaucracy and establishments of the older Institutions in Greece*”. He was also practical in helping us, and for three semesters he was coming from Athens to Patras once a week to teach “*Techno-Economic Study of Chemical Industries*” in our Department. During his visits in Patras we often had lunch in the “Faculty Club” (i.e., the Koukoutsis, local tavern in Rio !), and it was there that a real friendship grew up between us.



George with George Papatheodorou, at a dinner during the review of ICE-HT, the first ever review of a Greek academic institution by an external panel of reviewers.

Committee members: G. Stephanopoulos (Chair; MIT, US), B. Delmon (Univ. Catholique, Belgium), G. Gavalas (Caltech, US), E. Kaldis (ETH-Zurich, Switzerland), C. Kyparissides (Univ. of Thessaloniki, Greece), J. Petropoulos (Demokritos Res. Inst., Greece).

The first week of the “new year” 1983, George called a meeting for all four of us in an old traditional Café (ΠΩΣΙΚΟ) near to Omonia square in Athens. It was there that George talked about the creation of a new research Institute in Patras. A great idea, based on similar attempts in Crete, for the creation of Research Institutes independent from the general assemblies of the University Departments. Soon afterwards a proposal for the creation of the Institute of Chemical Engineering (ICE-HT) in Patras was submitted to the Ministry of Research involving all four of us. It took one and a half year for the Minister to give us a positive answer (September 1984). In the meantime George had accepted the professorship at MIT and left Greece in January 1984.

In the years that followed George tracked the creation and progress of the Institute and helped us in many respects.

In December 1986 he was the chairman of the review / evaluation committee for ICE-HT. A unique case, because at that time evaluation of Greek Institutes and Universities was “unthinkable” by the Greek academic establishment. So, George was the Chairman of the first evaluation of an academic institution ever done in *Greek territory*. The evaluation report is still available in my site: <http://www.iceht.forth.gr/staff/papatheodorou.html>.

In December 1993 George came back for the election of the ICE-HT director. With Andreas Akrivos as chairman, the evaluation committee spend three days in Patras. They set the framework for the procedures to be followed, and the quality criteria and thresholds to be met and exceeded by any candidate for the position, thus sending a very clear message to the Ministry on how such selections should be done for any research institute in Greece.



George with the committee for the selection of the new Director of ICE-HT. December 1993.

A.Acrivos (CCNY), G. Gavals (Caltech), P. Rentzepis (U.Cal.), D. Coucouvanis (Univ. of Michigan), N. Chatzichristides (Univ. of Athens), N. Petropoulos (Demokritos Research Inst.), G. Papatheodorou (ICE-HT, Univ. of Patras), Tonia Fardis (IC-HT), and Hera (not the Goddess).

In the years 1997-98 George was a part-time visiting researcher at ICE-HT. He developed connections with other European researchers, wrote the research proposal, and was successful in bringing money from the European Union's research program and established a research group at the Institute. He came frequently to Patras to work closely with the post-doc he hired for the research program, to give lectures, and to advise a multitude of graduate and undergraduate students of the Institute and the DCEUP. Unfortunately, his really fruitful presence was interrupted by Greek and EU bureaucracies.



George with Alkis Payatakes and Doros Theodorou, both of members ICE-HT and the faculty of DCEUP

In September 2009 George was the main speaker in the celebration of the 25th anniversary of ICE-HT. His reasoning and enthusiasm had a positive impact to the new generation of the young researchers of the Institute. The event and the talk of George were greatly appreciated by our good friend Alkis, who left us two month later.



George delivering the keynote lecture at the 25th Anniversary of ICE-HT

In closing up I would like to add that it is my strong belief that due to the “rare four body collision” (George, Alkis, Costas and I) that occurred in Patras in the early 80s two internationally competitive Institutions (DCEUP and ICE-HT) were created. Without George and his idea for the creation of the Institute probably none of us would have stayed in Patras.

George thank you for your support over the years



The Rio-Antirio Bridge, near the Institute: Photo by George Stephanopoulos, September 2009