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MAKEDONIA
PAIDEIA

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ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALONIKI
The Interdisciplinary Centre for Aristotle Studies
is attracting worldwide attention

The *Interdisciplinary Centre for Aristotle Studies* (DIKAM), of the *Aristotle University of Thessaloniki* (A.U.Th.), was established by unanimous decision of the Senate in July 2011. The purpose of the Centre, founded and chaired by Professor Emerita of Philosophy of Science, Demetra Sfendoni-Mentzou, is to study and promote on a global scale, through an interdisciplinary approach, Aristotle's work in areas covering not only the traditional fields of Philosophy, but also the fundamental disciplines of Science. This is what gives it its innovative character.

According to the president of the Centre, this aim is achieved through the organization of international scientific conferences, cultural events, lectures for the general public, publications of scientific volumes, and conference proceedings. The highlight event of DIKAM was the organization of the World Congress "Aristotle 2400 Years," in May 2016, at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, in ancient Stageira, and in ancient Mieza, with 250 speakers from 40 countries from all five continents.

In the field of science, the contribution of the Centre consists in the deepening of the study of every scientific domain. "Each scholar from his/her own scientific field tries to understand what Aristotle has said, for example, about biology, the physical world, and the structure of reality, to understand it in depth. Aristotle invented the very concept of science," explains professor Sfendoni-Mentzou and she continues, "The study of Aristotle helps us better understand the data of the sciences today, in any field. He has provided the basic logic and method of the sciences and has given us an enormous wealth of research, observations, and classifications for the study of the natural world. When a scientist reaches a phase of maturity, he/she is not satisfied only with the results of the experiments and the empirical data; in his/her seeking to deepen the understanding of these data Aristotle offers a great help."

Contribution to Society

Speaking about the contribution of DIKAM to society, its president points out: "Today we are faced globally with the climate crisis, the social inequalities, issues of justice, etc. Politics has been separated from ethics on a global scale. However, a great lesson from Aristotle is that you cannot have politics without ethics and you cannot have ethics without politics. This means, that politicians must cultivate ethical principles within their lives and apply them, and citizens must feel part of a community. Aristotle says, that in order to live alone one must either be a beast or a god. We have made great efforts to communicate our work to the public. In this context, we have conducted three lecture series titled "Aristotle Today," in collaboration with the Thessaloniki Concert Hall, where renowned scientists and philosophers of international standing participated, and people embraced our initiative. At the same time, at our suggestion, UNESCO declared 2016 the "Aristotle Anniversary Year" worldwide, and the Hellenic Post issued a Commemorative Series of Stamps for the 2,400th anniversary of Aristotle's birth. As part of our actions, we

globally promote Aristotle's birthplace, Ancient Stageira, and ancient Mieza, where he taught Alexander the Great. Actions that were carried out and continue to be done with zeal and ardent interest, but minimal funding, as we have no regular subsidy, but only sponsorships that we have to seek for on each occasion.”

Artificial Intelligence

"The study of Aristotle's work can help us solve problems in the field of technology development, especially artificial intelligence (AI)," says Professor Sfendoni-Mentzou, explaining that there are countless studies worldwide correlating Aristotle with artificial intelligence. "For now, we are in the discussion phase, but this study will significantly contribute to developing rules that can protect society from the adverse consequences of using artificial intelligence. There is, also, progress made in the field of the science of law, as processes have already begun to see what State and EU laws can be set to protect us from the effects of artificial intelligence implementation. In this way, Aristotle comes to the center of global interest. It is no coincidence that in an online survey conducted by MIT a decade ago, with the participation of citizens worldwide, Aristotle was voted the most significant figure in human history over the past 4,000 years. Following him, were Plato, Jesus Christ, Alexander the Great, etc.”

Primary Concern: Well-Being

The *United Nations* held a Summit in September 2024 focusing on the future. Globally, the following concern is raised: how will we shape our future to protect ourselves from challenges and dangers, with all the events happening around us, eg. wars, economic issues, and climate change? "Within this framework, the idea of the citizens' well-being--which is an Aristotelian idea--is also raised. The primary concern that a politician should have is the well-being of society. To achieve this goal, three things are important: the development of value ethics, the close relation between ethics and politics and paideia. A significant insightful theory of Aristotle is that of paideia, which has a broader meaning than education. Education is used for the development of skills, so that one can be successful in the field chosen; however, several important elements are missing from education. These belong to Aristotle's conception of paideia, which is a holistic concept that refers to the cultivation of the soul and the moral character of a person. It is the unification of ethics-politics and paideia that can lead to the well-being of the individual and the society. The basis of all these insightful ideas are found in Aristotle and Confucius. We thus believe that we need a collaboration between cultures and a reference to two of the most important thinkers, Aristotle and Confucius, of two of the oldest civilizations in the history of mankind, in order to create a model that can guide the world to a better future which is based on a global ethic. This brings to the forefront Aristotle and the *Interdisciplinary Centre for Aristotle Studies*, which has contributed to placing Aristotle on a global scale through its international conferences and other activities, which include collaborations with distinguished Aristotle scholars and prestigious international Institutions, such as the *United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network* and the *Confucius Institute of China*," concludes Prof. Sfendoni-Mentzou.

Framework

The Legacy and the Austrian Academy of Sciences

Professor Sfondoni-Mentzou, who has dedicated her life to promoting Aristotle's work on a global scale, does not hide her disappointment about the fact that Greeks do not show the proper acknowledgment of the value of the work of the emblematic philosopher. And she continues: "When the Senate of A.U.Th. entrusted me with the foundation of the Aristotle Centre, I set as the aim of the Center to expand as much as possible the horizon of the study and promotion of the work of Aristotle, the universal philosopher, who has an enormous contribution both to philosophy and to Science. This second part of his work has not received proper recognition in Greece, at least not to the extent it has abroad. Although Greece has enlightened the whole world with its culture, we, as Greeks, almost ignore this great heritage of Aristotle and all ancient Greek philosophers."

Professor Demetra Sfondoni-Mentzou is the only Professor at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, a member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Following the initial proposal to the Emperor by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, during his stay in Vienna (1712-14), this Academy was founded in 1847, encompassing the areas of Arts, Humanities, Social and Natural Sciences. Research conducted in the Academy, especially in Physics and Biology, is innovative and pioneering; several of its members are Nobel laureates. Professor Demetra Sfondoni-Mentzou was elected member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in March 2023, following a committee proposal and a voting procedure with the participation of at least 700 members from all countries.