

BIOPOLITICS INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION HELLENIC CHAPTER OF THE CLUB OF ROME



HELLENIC CHAPTER



Biopolicy – Inspiring innovation in the direction of climate change mitigation

Roundtable Discussion hosted at the

Bank of Greece

April 25, 2016

Press Release

The **Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.)** and the **Hellenic Chapter of the Club of Rome** successfully concluded a conference on **Biopolicy – Inspiring innovation in the direction of climate change mitigation**. The event was held on **April 25, 2016**, at the **Bank of Greece** and featured many distinguished speakers who clearly demonstrated the need for a major paradigm change for climate change mitigation, encompassing social, economic and political spheres.



The conference was chaired by **Professor Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis, President and Founder** of the **Biopolitics International Organisation** and the **Hellenic Chapter of the Club of Rome**, who greeted all participants and presented the concept of biopolicy as a global paradigm for climate change mitigation. “What a joy to have all of you here today, to communicate from the heart, to give perspectives on new horizons but to also address the state of the art in innovation for climate change mitigation. Time is of the essence, and there is not a moment to spare. People feel helpless and disappointed by their leaders. Arrogance and money are not the answer. Bios – life – the most precious possession on our planet, is the unique gift that we need to appreciate and maintain for the future. For the past thirty years, B.I.O. has tried to infuse society with biocentric values. This was the goal of the International University for the Bio-Environment, launched in 1991, as well as of numerous other initiatives aiming at lifting the barriers among sectors and placing environmental appreciation at the heart of society. A society of enlightened leadership and not of fragmented decisions that lead nowhere. Through the bio-assessment of progress, *techné* and technology, with creativity and vision, can create the beautiful dynamics for the protection of biodiversity, given to us so generously. A Bank of Ideas for climate change mitigation can

provide information and know-how quickly and efficiently to save time and resources. We need inspiration and a life-supporting vision to build a society of hope. We need to achieve mutual gain, not mutual suffering. Less than 1% of the world's population controls over 55% of the planet's wealth. It is time to mobilize them to invest in life-supporting strategies that will ensure the survival of our planet. The present symposium, held in such a historic and inspiring venue, can make a significant step forward in the search for answers. As we are faced with complex and ever-changing challenges, our distinguished speakers can vaccinate us with new thinking to bring about innovation and change.”

Dr. George Tyrogiannis, Director of the 2nd Internal Medicine Department at the P. Faliro Clinic of the Athens Medical Group expressed his appreciation and delight to see so many people with a genuine interest in the most valuable efforts of the Biopolitics International Organisation. “Our planet is blessed with the unique gift of biodiversity – 8.7 million species, while there is strong evidence that 80% of all species on the planet are still undiscovered. We are blessed to live in a world which is blessed with life. The term biopolitics itself alludes to the sum total of all fields and issues related to life. Bios (βίος) is an interesting word in its own right and can be further analyzed in two ways: our aspiration towards infinity ∞, towards our unlimited self, and the breath of life. Mother Earth acts like a womb that has provided the space and time for life to be born. We are currently failing to protect our planet and climate change represents one of the boundaries we have crossed in making our planet less hospitable. It is doubtful whether we, as humans, have a long future ahead of us if we fail to protect planet Earth. The options for creating a unified world are limitless; we just need to act. The letter “β” in βίος also symbolizes the lungs in our bodies, which deliver oxygen to all our cells. There are 37.2 trillion cells in the human body, all functioning in perfect harmony and collaboration. Let us draw inspiration from this harmony, as our ability to better the world can be infinitely expanded by preserving and enhancing life.”

Professor Momir Djurovic, President of the Montenegrin Academy of Sciences and Arts and f. Dean of the Electrical Engineering Faculty at the University of Montenegro, was the event's keynote speaker. “The problems of the 21st century cannot be addressed by any government or institution acting alone. As Mahatma Gandhi professed, ‘the world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed’. World population growth, dwindling natural resources and species, fast rates of extinction and exploitation, habitat loss, degradation and pollution are leading to an enormous ecological footprint, 25% higher than the planet is able to sustain. Moreover, global threats such as poverty, rapidly expanding inequality between the rich and poor, global warming and rising CO₂ emissions despite repeated alarm calls, point to the urgency of deploying technology and knowledge to address these unsolved challenges. The framework to assess the global prospects for humanity relies on scientific and technological breakthroughs. Energy, sustainable development, population growth, water and food security, education, disease prevention, migration, can be brought into balance by enhancing decision-making. However, technology has uncertain results and we must be able to secure that growing energy demands are met safely and efficiently. The Earth's energy budget both as a consumer and emitter of energy must be balanced. A difference between a 2°C degree and a 4°C degree rise in global temperature can be catastrophic. Soon enough, the challenge might be *survivability* not just sustainability. The shortcomings in policy frameworks are obvious. The dilemma of increasing economic growth at the expense of the environment in a business-as-usual scenario is no longer present. We need to look for new economic models and to change GDP on the basis of a dual strategy to solve the energy problem. We must massively reduce the absolute consumption of environmental resources, as extreme efficiency in the 21st century may allow society to function with 20% of its current energy consumption levels. Constructing a coherent vision for a civil society needs to become a priority for those who lead the world.”

Sotiris Mousouris, f. UN Assistant Secretary General, described how three days before, in New York, a high-level signing ceremony, convened by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, had taken place as a first step in implementing the Paris Agreement on climate change. “At the ceremony, U.S. Vice President Joe Biden declared that denying climate change is like denying gravity, while Leonardo DiCaprio gave an impassioned speech, calling for ‘no more talk, no more excuses, no more 10-year studies’. Human responsibility for climate change cannot be disputed. We can only be grateful to the Biopolitics International Organisation who has made it their duty to talk about these challenges and has convened the present meeting. Greenhouse gas emissions are on the rise as they have increased more than 5% since 2010. The poor of our planet suffer the most from climate change as they are the most vulnerable. Climate change leads to conflict and waves of refugees and migrants, resulting in social unrest. Polar ice caps are receding at alarming rates. It is difficult for governments to enforce emissions cuts, but businesses have to realize that innovation in this direction can result in profit as climate change is taking center stage in international policy. The UN meeting in Stockholm 44 years ago was just the beginning for the preservation and enhancement of the environment. Today, world leaders are announcing more and more initiatives and commitments, as the world expects urgent and effective action to meet these great challenges of our times. But there is a host of actions for individual citizens as well. Citizens can take action to clean the coastlines, to clean buildings from graffiti. Civil society must be present at every level, and meetings such as this, organized with passion and enthusiasm by Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis, are a step in the right direction. There is no excuse for inaction. No excuse if we do not want to say ‘no exit’.”



H.E. Benny Bahanadewa, Ambassador of Indonesia, thanked Professor Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis for promoting climate change issues and policies with such resilience and shared some of Indonesia’s experiences in the realm of global action for climate change mitigation. “It is a distinct privilege that leaders recently signed the Paris Agreement, a solid foundation in addressing climate change. Indonesia is a frontline state in the efforts to tackle the climate change and has been a passionate proponent of pro-environment policies at the domestic and global level. As the largest archipelago in the world, with the second largest biodiversity in the world, Indonesia is a passionate proponent of climate change policy development. Indonesia also participates in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) which has been a major focus of the country’s international relations. As an island nation, Indonesia is very vulnerable to

the effects of climate change, including natural disasters, risk of flooding, sea level rise, food insecurity, and increase in water borne and vector borne diseases. In 2009, Indonesia pledged to a voluntary target of a 26% reduction in GHG emissions below the business as usual level by 2020 and has since promulgated many relevant legal and policy instruments. In 2015, Indonesia made a commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and took several steps in the direction of climate change mitigation and adaptation in areas such as the forestry sector, waste management, and transportation and energy. The government also issued a National Action Plan on climate change adaptation with an integrated concept. Adopting appropriate legal instruments and government institutions is essential in building ecosystem and landscape resilience, as well as economic and social resilience.”



Theodora Antonakaki, Climate Change Impact Study Committee Scientific Secretary for the Bank of Greece, mentioned that, in 2009, the Bank of Greece set up a Committee of Scientists in order to produce a study on the environmental, economic and social impacts of climate change in Greece, and, in particular, on the cost of climate change for the Greek economy. “In the current second phase of the project, the Committee is working on a new study to contribute to the formulation of a national adaptation strategy on climate change. The cost of climate change is very high – estimated in the range of 700 million Euros – if no action is taken. Unfortunately, in Greece, a ‘symptosis’ of the environmental with the economic crisis has diverted public attention from the long-term benefits of climate change mitigation. New growth models must be adopted in climate finance to aid the transition to a low carbon economy and to address financial and structural problems. For this, it is necessary to have institutional measures leading to effective climate change policies. The UN agreement that was signed to keep a global temperature rise well below 2 degrees Celsius strengthens our ability to deal with the impacts of climate change. However, we need to merge climate policies with sustainability and survivability policies. The work of the Biopolitics International Organisation complements the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals and I would like to thank you and wish you every success in your endeavors.”

Michael Scoullas, Professor of Environmental Chemistry at the University of Athens and UNESCO Chairman on Sustainable Development Management and Education in the Mediterranean, thanked Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis for her warm welcome and for organizing the present event, as well as the previous speakers for their contribution, and proceeded to point out that: “When we are faced with huge problems such as climate change we first treat them with denial. The second phase involves a long analysis of the problem, which often leads to paralysis.

Then we feel too small to take action, and panic as we are about to approach this stage. Key facts and messages from the last IPCC report show that climate change is a threat and also an opportunity. Humanity has the means to limit climate change and build a more sustainable and resilient future. In the Mediterranean there is an increased frequency of dry winters with high temperatures. This is leading to mass mortality of marine invertebrates due to thermal shock. The entire nexus of energy, water, food and ecosystem security is threatened on all sides by climate change. Polar ice caps are receding and the changes are evident in every sector. We do not have the appropriate tools to cope with these challenges. We need to change and try to use new tools for more effective governance that will reduce vulnerability to pressures and enhance resilience so that systems can return to equilibrium. We need new technological, institutional, informational, educational and cultural tools, linked with models of governance, economy, sharing and distribution. We also need sector specific policies and regulatory approaches for equity, justice and fairness. This requires changes in the flow of investment, especially in the energy sector with a reduction in fossil fuels and an increase in renewables and in resource efficiency. We may be the last generation in a position to do something for the future. We need generous measures for mitigation and adaptation and a vast education and awareness raising campaign to radically change lifestyles, production and consumption patterns and symbols of success.”

Gaetano Leone, Coordinator of UNEP’s Mediterranean Action Plan and Barcelona Convention Secretariat, spoke about the Mediterranean as a defining element of our identity and a crucial source of our development. “The Mediterranean features 46,000 km of coastline while its population, one third of which lives in coastal areas, is estimated to reach 530 million by 2025. The area also harbors a very rich biodiversity, with 4%–18% of all species found in the world today. The Mediterranean is clearly under threat. But we want to be remembered for the solutions we give for the survival of our planet, so the issue at stake is to act and act now. The Mediterranean is a crucial source of development, sustaining millions of livelihoods. Coastal tourism is a rapidly growing industry, with 343 million tourists in 2014 which are expected to reach 500 million in 2030. Similarly, fisheries support 250,000 jobs. Climate change poses great risks and costs to human populations and biodiversity. Mitigation is an opportunity to redirect the way we use natural resources. The Paris agreement to limit the temperature increase well below 2°C, which was signed by 171 countries in New York this April, is an extraordinary and unprecedented achievement, also expected to mobilize 100 billion dollars by 2020 to support action on a global level. The world is committed to a global response. We all need and can make climate smart choices and look at our carbon footprint not only as part of the problem but also as part of the solution. Another important initiative concerns the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development 2016–2025 which was adopted by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, during their 19th Ordinary Meeting in Athens, in February 2016. The aim of this strategy is to increase scientific knowledge, raise awareness, and develop technical capacities, leverage existing and emerging climate finance mechanisms, including international and domestic instruments, enhance the engagement of the private and finance sectors, and encourage institutional, policy and legal reforms for the effective mainstreaming of climate change responses into national and local development frameworks, particularly in the energy sector. The achievements of the Barcelona Convention are manifold and include an advanced and comprehensive legal framework for a solid and effective governance mechanism for marine and coastal ecosystems that are productive and biologically diverse, as well as collaboration and dialogue for wide-wide-ranging action towards a healthy Mediterranean for us and for future generations.”

Professor Christos Efthymiopoulos, Researcher A’ at the Center for Astronomy and Applied Mathematics at the Academy of Athens, thanked Professor Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis for her initiative and discussed how we can understand the role that biopolitics itself has to play in an issue like global climate change by summarizing B.I.O.’s experiences over the last 30 years. “I

am grateful to the previous speakers for touching on specific points and, in particular, on the phases of facing a crisis. I will therefore start with the phase of denial. What is it that we are denying? Is it just climate change? After all, in the geological history of our planet, we have experienced several phases of climate change induced by natural factors. But actually the main point, the main question that the IPCC was asked to clarify, was whether climate change in its present state is anthropogenic. The true question here is whether it is possible to scientifically demonstrate the probability that human actions are able to have global effects. So why is it so difficult to accept an answer given by scientists to a particular question that is supposedly also posed on a scientific level and why is it so difficult to accept the answer? This brings us to the second point that was also presented by some of the other speakers – denial of responsibility. It is much easier to accept a fact when you do not have to accept responsibility for it. There is reluctance when remediation costs are also taken into account. Is it the responsibility of developed countries? Should developing countries also have a share in the cost of remedying the situation? Climate change is anthropogenic, but there are deep ethical questions concerning our responsibilities. I was very glad to hear Professor Djurovic say that the 1980s definition of sustainable development – development which satisfies the needs of the present generation without jeopardizing the needs of future generations – is now obsolete. This is a clearly anthropocentric idea, and now we talk about survivability, but, again, whose survival? In biopolitics we have called it biocentric development, biocentric values, our responsibility for saving not only the fate of humanity, but saving all forms of bios on this planet. So when we speak about policies we should place at their core the preservation of bios, and only then will humanity find its rightful position in a context that is much wider, both in timescale and complexity. In biopolitics, we have been trying for the last 30 years to make all sectors of society in more than 170 countries realize that the only true answer to the challenges posed by climate change will come when we understand that biocentric values need to become the essence of humanity.”

The speeches were followed by a discussion and questions from the audience, which included members of parliament, business leaders, scientists, academics and other people of influence. The overwhelmingly positive response from all participants confirmed the need for a new vision to shape our world and worldviews in order to dynamically address the climate change challenge.

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