



## THE 5TH MEETING OF BALKAN UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION

The 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of Balkan University Association's was hosted by Aristotle University of Thessaloniki under the title "Application of United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals in the Balkans: Role of Universities" on April 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019. 46 Balkan universities, 37 of which are BUA members and the rest 9 universities are candidates, and in total 168 participants attended the meeting.



The first day of Balkan Universities Association meeting began with "High Education Quality Control" workshop on April 16th, 2019. Hellenic Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (HQA) Chairman Prof. Pantelis KYPRIANOS gave a presentation named " Academic Accreditation Requirements at European High Education and National Quality Assurance Agencies".



Turkish Council of High Education Quality Committee Chairman Prof. Dr. Muzaffer ELMAS gave a presentation titled "International Accreditation". Prof. Dr. ELMAS underlined that by the year 2025, available jobs will be halved, 75% of them will be connected to the STEM and features such as social intelligence, interpretation, innovative and applicable thinking, intercultural communication skills, new media literacy, design-based and numerical thinking will have gained importance. Prof. Dr. Muzaffer ELMAS also pointed out that by the year 2030, the learning structure will be highly reliant on technology for students or academic personnel, and distance education, artificial intelligence and augmented reality will be gaining importance. Besides, he also added that the primary responsibilities and missions of the High Education Quality Committee are Institutional External Evaluation, Authorization-Recognition of Institutional Accreditation and Expansion and Internalization of Quality Assurance Culture; and stated that institutes are first to be responsible for its own Quality Assurance. Prof. Dr. Muzaffer ELMAS expressed that Accreditation is the best method in international and regional cooperation.



On the second session, Dr. Konstantios AIVAZIDIS and Alexandra TZANERAKI from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Quality Assurance Unit made their presentation under the title of "Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Quality Management System: A proposal for monitoring Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)' integration in academic curriculum and researches.". In the aforementioned presentations, after introducing sub branches of quality management system such as information services, human resources etc., the harmony of many European-based systems such as Erasmus+, Erasmus Mundus and their advantages for students, academicians and university personnel were referred. In addition, it was underlined that transfer for

students and academicians between European countries has become easier, knowledge exchange has increased and intercultural communication has become possible thanks to these systems.



European Education Programs Department Chairman of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Ioanna GEORGIADOU, Nikos LIOLIOS, and Konstantina TOLIA gave their presentation titled "Quality or Quantity? Ways to Enhance Students' Mobility with Quality, Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility: New Features, Old Problems". In their presentations, the quality of students courses credits and the issues regarding monitoring students were discussed. After explaining the process structure of Erasmus, especially Erasmus+, the subject of the presentation became how these programs help students and academicians who desire to study internationally but are not aware of their talents. It was also discussed how international exchange promoted cooperation

through Erasmus+ and the results of such cooperation. The audiences were informed about the process of Erasmus+ program and the problems concerning this system; and potential solutions were set forth.



On the first day of BUA Thessaloniki meeting, member universities of the BUA Executive Committee (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Tetovo University, University of Bucharest, and Trakya University as the member of Balkan Universities Association Permanent Secretariat and Permanent Executive Committee) gathered under the presidency of Rector Prof. Dr. Pericles A. MITKAS. In the meeting, it was decided that the presidency of Balkan Universities Association should be made by a country rotation method. According to this method, member universities present the recommended university to the Assembly. On the condition that the recommended candidate is not appropriate for this task, the right of Presidency skips to the next university within the rotation. After the list of rotation comes to an end, the presidency turn goes back to the top of the list again.



On the second day of the 5<sup>th</sup> Balkan Universities Association meeting, April 17th, 2019, Trakya University gave an opening speech with Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Rector Prof. Dr. Pericles A. MITKAS. Prof. MITKAS said that in the founding years of the university, it was named University of Thessaloniki but as a kind of respect to renowned philosopher Aristoteles, it was renamed as Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Prof. MITKAS also underlined that the university was founded in 1925, and currently features many faculties, libraries, research centers, a university hospital and four hospitals connected to the University, and also has 86,159 graduate and postgraduate students. Regarding the percentage of the members taking part in Balkan Universities Association, Prof. MITKAS expressed that the Thessaloniki meeting has seen a major attendance. Prof. MITKAS thanked the participants, the presenters, the organization committee, BUA Executive Committee and BUA General Secretariat and after honoring the speakers attending BUA 2019 meeting as specialist in their fields, he expressed that their experiences will be important in guiding the Association.



Rector Prof. MITKAS left the stand to Rector of Trakya University for his speech. Rector Prof. TABAKOĞLU started his speech by thanking every member who helped for the development of Balkan Universities Association for endeavoring to organize the 5<sup>th</sup> BUA Annual Meeting, as well as BUA Chairman and Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Rector Prof. Dr. Pericles A. MITKAS for contributing to the BUA standards and everyone who attended to this meeting. Rector Prof. TABAKOĞLU concluded his speech by thanking Prof. Dr. Vulnett AMETI who hosted the 4<sup>th</sup> BUA meeting last year and the Executive Committee for their contributions to the meeting.



Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC) Secretary-General Ambassador H. E. Michael CHRISTIDES took the stand for his "Regional Organizations as promoters of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The case of the BSEC Organization" presentation. Ambassador CHRISTIDES stated that BSEC has been established by a treaty signed in a summit held in Istanbul on June 25th, 1992 and has been working in the field for a long time. After expressing that the Organization features 20 sub-work teams and these groups have an annual meeting, Ambassador CHRISTIDES added that the Organization has divisions such as BSEC Parliament Council, BSEC Labor Council, International Black Sea Research Center, Black Sea Trade and Development Bank and told that this information can give certain ideas as to how BUA functions.



European Universities Association (EUA) Chairman Prof. Dr. Rolf TARRACH took the stage for his presentation titled "The Voice of European Universities". Prof. TARRACH, in his presentation regarding EUA, remarked that EUA has 850 members from 48 countries. The main purpose of EUA was described as easing communication in fields of higher education and research, representing the views of the higher education sector, helping develop EU policies, giving voice to European Universities, developing strategies and supporting its members by numerous services such as thematic groups/focus groups, activities, and publications. Explaining the three basic activities of EUA, Chairman TARRACH underlined that the researches are carried out on two levels: system level (via the National Rectorate Conference) and institution level. Chairman Prof. TARRACH explained that 2019-2020 goals of EUA are to strengthen the research and development in European Universities, to provide quality, validity, and comprehensiveness in teaching and education, to emphasize the importance of universities for societies, to struggle for improving the conditions of European Universities and to improve European higher education and research fields on a global scale.



Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Rector Prof. Dr. Pericles A. MITKAS, in his "Sustainable Development Goals: The role of Universities" presentation, announced that 2030 Sustainable Development Goals Calendar's 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 goals were accepted in the UN exclusive summit on September 25th, 2015 by the heads of states and governments. Prof. MITKAS added that considering different national facts, development levels, national policies, priorities, Sustainable Development Goals should be applied in every developing and developed country. Rector MITKAS insisted on the necessity of universities to focus on developing educational missions such as teaching, learning, scientific research, serving public. He also said that Higher Education could do more than just offering a higher level of education and skill

development opportunities. After expressing that universities are institutes which are likely to raise perfect teachers, conduct groundbreaking researches and be the bond between services and society, he expressed that the most significant thing is that universities can build an "army of believers" who know they can succeed. Prof. MITKAS remarked that universities should develop new perspectives for Sustainable Development Goals and then mentioned the policies which universities follow regarding Sustainable Development Goals.



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Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Chairman Nicolaos P. THEODOSSIOU contributed to the main theme of the meeting through his presentation titled "Sustainable Development Solutions Network: Challenges and Opportunities".



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Afternoon sessions continued with the presentations and speeches with the titles of “Balkan Studies, European Academic and Research Networks, Research Projects and Cooperation, Modern Approaches in Agriculture and Forestry, Sustainable Development, Higher Education Quality Control and International Accreditation”. Because of the plans and comments regarding the fact that Balkan Universities Association is not just a meeting of Rectors, but also houses Deans and scholars from member universities; Deans of Faculties of Medicine and Economy of member universities come together in BUA 2019 Thessaloniki meeting.



BUA Rectorate meeting was held on April 18th, 2019 in Thessaloniki Municipality Town Hall Meeting Room under the administration of BUA Term-President Rector MITKAS. After the greeting speech of Rector MITKAS, the Mayor of Thessaloniki Yannis BOUTARIS gave his speech. Expressing that various ethnic groups reside in the Balkans and Greece has positive relations with all their neighbors, Mr. BOUTARIS underlined that having a good relationship with the past, and these bonds established will bring about an assured future. Mentioning that a bright future for next generations can only be promised with proper education, Mr. BOUTARIS ended his speech by expressing his gratitude for hosting such a meeting as Thessaloniki Municipality.



Rector MITKAS announced that an "Honorary Presidency" plaque will be given to Prof. Dr. Enver DURAN for pioneering the establishment of Balkan Universities Association. Prof. DURAN underlined that he is also a member of a Balkan family and that they all share the same culture, geography, and have several similar values. Highlighting the significance of cooperation in the Balkans by speaking in Greek language, Prof. DURAN remarked that he served as the Rector of Trakya University for two terms and during this period they always embraced the Balkans by means of various conferences, education, acceptance of students from the Balkans, cultural meeting spots and Balkan institutions.



On the last day of the meeting, Rector Prof. Dr. Erhan TABAKOĞLU gave a speech titled "History and Future Plans of BUA". Its main topic was Trakya University's capabilities and the number of students and personnel. Rector Prof. TABAKOĞLU gave the statistics that their university hosts 3300 International students, 2700 of whom are from the Balkans, and also mentioned the bond between Balkans and Trakya University. Ioannina University Rector Prof. Triantafyllos ALMPANIS took the stage for his "The Role and Participation of the Universities in the Smart Specialization Programs" presentation. In his presentation, Prof. ALMPANIS explained that innovation and development quality stems from universities and gave an example from Greece. He stated that despite the troubled economic times in Greece, universities kept improving in research facilities, and as a result of this improvement, communication level increased in international areas. He added that despite their shrinking budget, the universities in Greece would be able to keep standing through regional researches and production and to continue contributing to their country by means of international communication.



Vice-Rector of Trakya University Prof. Dr. Cem UZUN then took the stage for his "Contribution of the Universities to Scientific Publications" titled speech. After briefly covering their efforts to improve the quality of Trakya University scientific journals, he mentioned that in this context there had been many conferences held both at Trakya University and University of Bucharest. He also pointed out the fact that since Prof. Dr. Enver DURAN's administration, every Balkan country's flag stands in front of the Rectorate Building because the Balkans means much to their university. Aside from these points, he also remarked that Trakya University Faculty of Medicine has finished its Accreditation procedures and this will help develop their relations furthermore. He added that their journal began publication under the title of "Trakya University Faculty of Medicine Journal" but its name was renewed in 2011 as "Balkan Medical Journal" and it is published triennially and has publications in English and Turkish language. Vice-Rector Prof. UZUN continued by mentioning the studies related to how their journal got accepted into Pubmed/MEDLINE index and stated that their journal is the one and only sample for university journals in Turkey. He expressed that in the context of the journal there had been over 20 scientific meetings and by this way he shared all his experience and knowledge of editorship and publication. Giving information regarding open science, open access and Plan S, he invited Balkan Universities to rethink about renewing their journal access contracts with big publication companies for 2020 and after.



University of Bucharest Rector Prof. Dr. Mircea DUMITRU took the stage for his "Science, Truth, Democracy: A Troubled Togetherness?" presentation. In his presentation, Prof. DUMITRU discussed the troubled relationship between science, democracy and society and the influence of democratic approach imposed to the society on science. He continued by mentioning that science is negatively affected by social sanctions based on ethics, religion et c. and how science is stagnating due to the process of democratization and discussed its prospective future reflections. Prof. DUMITRU discussed that democracy brings out the social structure and how science is affected by it; and also stated that the issue of combining human subjectivity with science is going to become one of the major topics of 21st century. Rector DUMITRU underlined that "scientism" concept is still open for discussion and it is difficult to put it into practice.



As a result of the Assembly voting procedure, Baltazar Zapresic Applied Sciences University, University of Mitrovica - Isa Boletini, University of Niş, Arel University – Istanbul, University of Western Macedonia – Kozani, Democritus University of Thrace – Komotini, University of Macedonia – Thessaloniki, Athens University of Economics and Business, University of the Aegean – Mytiline, Harokopio University – Athens, Zagreb University, Bandırma Onyedı Eylöl University (associate membership), New York Tirana University (associate membership) were accepted as BUA members by the majority votes of the Assembly.

As the 2018-2019 Term-Chairman of BUA, Rector Prof. TABAKOĞLU presented Prof. Dr. Pericles A. MITKAS his Presidency Certificate. With Rector MITKAS's transferring the Presidency to Rector DUMITRU, the Handover Ceremony was concluded. BUA Charter Signature Ceremony was held with the Assembly's approval for final amendments to the BUA charter.





As a result of the voting by the Assembly, Bosnia-Herzegovina Tuzla University Rector Prof. Dr. Nermina HADŽIGRAHIĆ was appointed as the BUA Chairman for 2020-2021 term.

