

UNAI MEMBER ACTIVITY REPORT 2016/2017

University of Macedonia

Greece

During the 2016/2017 reporting period, University of Macedonia undertook a number of activities that underscore its commitment to UNAI and its principles. The following examples stand out as particularly noteworthy:

1. Conference «Human rights and the issue of migrant – refugee crisis in Greece» (University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki, Greece, 13 February 2016)

The particular UNAI activity was organized by the Deanship of the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts of the University of Macedonia in collaboration with the teachers of the local branch of the Pan-Hellenic Association of Legal and Political Sciences. Professor Ilias Kouskouvelis, Dean of the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts of the University of Macedonia, and Dr Ioannis Adamopoulos, School Counselor of Legal and Political Sciences in secondary education, had the academic supervision and the scientific coordination of the conference. The conference was primarily addressed to teachers who specialize in law and political science, and are involved in the teaching of the courses “Social and Civic Education” and “Political Education” in lower and upper secondary education. In addition, the conference invited every proactive citizen who was interested in the matter to attend. The particular activity expressed the institution’s commitment to the following UNAI principles: (a) Advancement of peace and conflict resolution through education; (b) Promotion of inter-cultural dialogue and understanding, and “unlearning” of intolerance, through education; (c) Commitment to human rights, among them freedom of inquiry, opinion, and speech.



The conference focused on the on going migrant and refugee crisis in Greece and attempted to present the most important aspects of it under the human rights lens. For this reason the speakers had diverse professional backgrounds and experience from public administration, education, research, medicine and NGOs. Mr Kostis Papaioannou, General Secretary of

Disclaimer: This activity report has been submitted by University of Macedonia and does not necessarily reflect the views of or represent an endorsement by the United Nations Academic Impact.

Transparency and Human Rights of the Greek Ministry of Justice analyzed the views of the Greek government regarding the management of the issue and presented a leaflet especially prepared in order to offer information relevant to the protection of the migrants' and the refugees' human rights. Dr George Boundouris, doctor and member of volunteering groups, shared his experience of the refugee camp in Idomeni. Ms Diamanto Vlasi, teacher attached to the Asylum Bureau of the Greek Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection, presented the interventions that aspired to establish educational activities in the camps in order that refugees and migrants improve their language and social skills, acquire information about their hosting country and the European Union and are offered support for better integration. Mr Nikos Gavalas, manager of the NGO ARSIS, talked about his experiences from the various actions offered by the organization in refugee camps and in its shelters for unaccompanied minors asylum seekers. The conference was concluded with an experiential workshop, during which members of the NGO ARSIS worked with groups of participants and offered them the opportunity to empathize with refugees and migrants, to reflect upon the posed challenges and to reconsider their attitudes as citizens of the host country.

2. Article of Professor Ilias Kouskouvelis in “New Europe” (6 October 2016)

On October 6, 2016, Professor Ilias Kouskouvelis, Dean of the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts, published an article titled “The Refugee crisis: Is this the Europe we aspire to?” in “New Europe”, a leading EU affairs newspaper published since 1993, with its headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. Professor Kouskouvelis made reference to UNAI by stating that the University of Macedonia is a United Nations Academic Impact institution. Moreover, the article analyzed the refugee crisis and criticized the attitude of European countries towards migrants and refugees, whereas indirectly projected the UNAI principles and values regarding the advancement of peace and conflict resolution, respect of human rights, tolerance and solidarity, inter-cultural dialogue and understanding. The particular activity expressed the institution's commitment to the following UNAI principles: (a) Promotion of inter-cultural dialogue and understanding, and “unlearning” of intolerance, through education; (b) Commitment to human rights, among them freedom of inquiry, opinion, and speech; (c) Advancement of peace and conflict resolution through education. The full text of the article is quoted below. The electronic version of the article is available [here](#).

The European integration project, throughout its history, has faced various political and economic crises. None of them, however, was so closely related to its moral foundations as the refugee crisis. With hundreds of thousands of war and environmental refugees, and of economic migrants knocking at its door, Europe appears to be uncomfortable, indecisive, politically divided, and old in its reflexes. Nationalistic and xenophobic feelings have surfaced, damaging Europe's unity, moral prestige and interests.

In the last two years the refugees flow towards Europe was strong. Hundreds of thousands of people have crossed the sea to Italy and Greece. Those in Greece moved north and engaged the “Balkan route”. And, there xenophobic governments first stopped them, then let them through, and, finally sealed their borders. It is true, close to a million managed to reach Germany, but then, under the pressure of the far right and of electoral results, this government had also to change its policy.

Disclaimer: This activity report has been submitted by University of Macedonia and does not necessarily reflect the views of or represent an endorsement by the United Nations Academic Impact.

Now the refugees are caught in a trap. Many have stayed in Greece and Italy, and others in some Balkan or Central European country. All of them, however, are trying to find alternative routes to the North. Those are the “lucky” ones that have crossed the sea, which most of them had never seen in their lives; they have spent fortunes to pay smugglers and black marketers; they waited for days in front of police stations or borders; they have walked thousands of kilometres carrying their babies and the elderly, just in order to face closed gates, racism, and police brutality.

This situation, despite the efforts undertaken, remains “unacceptable”. There are states that still block or hinder decisions, as very recently in Vienna. They still ask, forgetting how many souls were lost at sea, that Greece and Italy stop them... They consider refugees to be a threat to their culture, to their social and religious fabric. It seems they are forgetting that hundreds of thousands of their citizens fled to the EU countries in the 1990s after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. Worst, many of their citizens seem to forget fundamental Christian principles or ignore the messages sent by the Pope himself. Most important is that they violate the very foundations of European integration, to that extent that European governments and all of us, citizens, need to answer the question: is this the Europe we aspire to? Is this Europe that aspires to peace, democracy, prosperity and human dignity?

No! The Europe we want for us and our children is the one shown by the average citizen who gave food, water, clothes, shelter, and medicines to the refugees; is the one shown by the men and women of the Greek and Italian coast guards or navies, and by those who saved lives at sea; it is the Europe of volunteers who assisted human beings! This is the Europe from which the governments need to be inspired in their decisions, while responding to legitimate domestic and international security concerns.

It is certain that the refugee crisis will not stop until conflicts in the Middle East and in Africa end, until hunger and draught are dealt with. And this will certainly take a long time... Until then, Europe will have to deal with thousands of human beings fleeing war zones or famine, and has to do it according to its values. It is in the interest of the EU and of its member states. Otherwise the damage to the EU foundations, values, prestige, but also to the economic and political interests, will be much greater than any other cost some short-sighted governments are afraid of.

3. Conference «Local culture and educational programs. Means of soft power for the cities’ international relations» (Drama and Doxato, Greece, 22-24 September 2017)

In 2017 the University of Macedonia organized a three-day conference, which aspired to disseminate the UNAI principles and values in the broader community. Moreover, the conference was an opportunity for interaction between different stakeholders from the academic and the civil society and was expected to contribute to the creation of synergies between different academic and social actors. The activity of 2017 expressed the institution’s commitment to the following UNAI principles: (a) Promotion of sustainability through education; (b) Advancement of peace and conflict resolution through education; (c) Promotion of inter-cultural dialogue and understanding, and “unlearning” of intolerance, through education.

Disclaimer: This activity report has been submitted by University of Macedonia and does not necessarily reflect the views of or represent an endorsement by the United Nations Academic Impact.

The conference was organized in collaboration with the Directorate of Primary Education of the Prefecture of Drama in northern Greece. The theme of the conference was «Local culture and educational programs. Means of soft power for the cities' international relations» and was held in the city of Drama, as well as in the small town Doxato in 22-24 September 2017.

The conference was addressed to primary and secondary education teachers, to officers of the local government and to members of the civil society. The original idea was founded on aspirations for better coordination between the local cultural development and the utilization of the local tangible or intangible cultural heritage in order that the dynamism and the soft power of the region are further enhanced. Also, our approach was associated with the promotion of multilevel international or interregional synergies.

The three days conference combined sessions of academic analyses and experiential workshops that offered participants opportunities for the acquisition of useful knowledge and practical skills as regards the role of culture in solving the crises or bridging differences. The particular conference brought together academics from four universities, three from Greece and one from Bulgaria, as well as experts on cultural issues. The participants aimed at disseminating the scientific perceptions regarding the relation between culture and education, the protection and the promotion of cultural heritage through educational projects and the enrichment of local cultural action. The main objective of the conference was to contribute to the reconsideration of local cultural activities, to the establishment of a strong brand-name for the region and to its transformation into an instrument for crisis resolution.

Besides its contribution to the organization of the conference, the University of Macedonia participated with two members of the academic society. Dr Sofia Boutsiouki, Lecturer and the University's responsible for the UNAI initiative, made a presentation that referred to the role of education in the development of broader cultural synergies, whereas she analyzed the utility of particular existing interventions as models for action at local and regional level; moreover, she made a detailed presentation of the UNAI network, of its principles and of its potential to support the dissemination of common initiatives and values. Dr Nikolaos Vasiliadis, Associate Professor, made a historical analysis of cultural values and of their role in education in order to show their importance in cultural understanding in modern societies. In addition, the two University of Macedonia professors had the opportunity to pursue closer collaboration with colleagues from other universities in an effort to make the UNAI principles known to more tertiary education institutions and to develop common actions in the future.

Link: www.uom.gr

Disclaimer: This activity report has been submitted by University of Macedonia and does not necessarily reflect the views of or represent an endorsement by the United Nations Academic Impact.