

OPENING SPEECH

Sotiris Mikalef – r. lawyer – Former Mayor of the City of Corfu

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I am very delighted and deeply touched that your Conference honours today a prominent figure in Education, Research and Science, my friend, classmate and fellow citizen, **George Zoupanos** – a man with whom I have been sharing a long-standing friendship, which was forged during our school – and high-school – years (at the 2nd Male High-School of Corfu), back at the time when we used to play in the same neighbourhood.

My friend, George Zoupanos, was already then an exceptional individual. He was distinguished by his learning spirit, thoroughness, sense of responsibility, integrity, tenacious fighting spirit, and resilience in pursuing his goals. These characteristics helped him stand out in his life and his scientific career, elevating him as a leading figure in his scientific field. The studies that he has carried out, his scientific and research publications, as well as his teaching, have all contributed to his ranking among top-tier renowned scientists.

George Zoupanos did not withdraw himself in the sphere of his own scientific interests and personal endeavours. He did not distance himself from the society that he lived in. He has always been present in society's struggles, fighting for the "citizen's" legitimate and indisputable rights. He has been an ideal example of "THE ACTIVE CITIZEN". As a member of a society faced with challenges, he stood up for it, calling for solutions. Hence, while Mayor Yiannis Kourkoulos was in office, we worked together in the framework of the initiatives developed by the Municipality of Corfu, and also during the **Congresses on Debating Issues of Corfu** and the **Corfiot Weeks (1979, 1980, 1981)**, in order to highlight the challenges faced in the Ionian region, demanding, inter alia, a response to the legitimate and constant request of the Corfiot and Ionian Islands' citizens for the revival of the IONIAN ACADEMY, the very first Greek University operating in the Greek territory, which was closed down in 1864, as

soon as the Ionian State Union with Greece was effected. Thanks to the significant role of George Zoupanos in the efforts to restore the operation of the Ionian Academy, the “IONIAN UNIVERSITY”, was founded in 1984.

But there are also other noteworthy initiatives started by George Zoupanos that deserve mention, as they have been instrumental in designating Corfu as a conference destination. In 1981, George Zoupanos suggested that a twenty-day Scientific Conference be held in Corfu every three years, in collaboration and with the support of the Municipality of Corfu; the Municipal Council endorsed his proposal unanimously. Accordingly, since September 1982, a series of **Corfu Meetings –Schools on Elementary Particle Physics have been taking place in Corfu every three years – and annually, since 2009**. The meetings have been **held by the Hellenic Physical Society, the Society of Elementary Particles, and the Municipality of Corfu, with the participation of leading scientists from across the globe**. Moreover, George Zoupanos proposed to the Municipality of Corfu to set up a civil-law non-profit company under the name **“European Institute for Sciences and Their Applications” (EISA)**, with the participation of the National Technical University and the Municipality of Corfu. The proposal was adopted by the Municipal Council pursuant to decision no. 6-105/23-3-2006, with the aim, among other things, to advance the forefront of European research activities in the broader area of sciences and their applications, foster the education of young scientists at postgraduate and postdoctoral level, develop a popularisation programme regarding activity in the sciences field and their applications, and encourage a connection with the interests of the wider public. These meetings attracted significant interest across the scientific community, as more than 350 scientists from 40 countries have been taking part, in order to present their work and be informed on the developments in research. From 2009 onwards, annual regular meetings have been taking place, held by the National Technical University and the Municipality of Corfu, with the participation of CERN, as well as many other prestigious European universities and research institutes. These events culminated in the period of 2021–2022, during which two workshops and eight conferences were held, with the participation of over 850 leading scientists. The soul behind all these initiatives and actions was the person honoured, George Zoupanos.

He strove tenaciously for the permanent establishment and continuous operation of the European Institute for Sciences and their Applications in the Mon Repos facilities, located in the area of Palaiopolis. The Municipality of Corfu had previously placed the facilities at the disposal of the Ministry of Culture, to be maintained, renovated and valorised. However, the Ministry of Culture never showed any substantial interest, which forced me, during my tenure as Mayor (2007-2010) to initiate proceedings for the termination of the concession contract and for the reinstatement of the facilities to the Municipality, in order to be maintained and restored, and ultimately to be used by EISA. After seven years of persistent efforts, George Zoupanos managed to secure the conduct of special surveys and the financing of maintenance and redevelopment works in the facilities amounting to € 2,000,000.00.

I must confess that what I have said above about George Zoupanos does not express only my own subjective views, but rather the standpoint of the society of Corfu as a whole, part of which is George himself. And it is this society that honours him for his entire scientific trajectory and his scientific and social, selfless contribution to our island.

I personally thank him for our friendship, his support and contribution to Corfu, and for his support throughout my tenure as Mayor.

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Former Mayor of the City of Corfu