

FLORATOSFEST 2014

“A Hydra (Sea)man in Larisa”?

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where and when **Manólis Florátos
began his academic career in 1983**

- The University of Crete, located in two cities, **Rethymnon** (humanities, social sciences) and **Herakleion** (physical and biomedical sciences) began its life as an institution in the 1970's,
- and held its first elections of tenure track teaching personnel in the summer of 1982.
- The bodies of electors for each faculty were international, and half of their members were distinguished academics from the Greek diaspora.
- **Floratos** was among the first professors who were elected to staff the Physics Department. He was appointed in 1983 and elected by his colleagues, first, as acting Chairman (1983–85) and then, after the Department grew enough to attain independence, as Chairman (1985–1990). He kept being re-elected to that office until the mid-nineties.

- **Then, time came for him to move to Athens in order to assume the directorship of the Institute of Nuclear Physics of the National Center for Scientific Research, “Demokritos” (1995-2003).**

I lost Floratos’ traces after that, nor could I speak about the continuation of his career in Demokritos (he became President of “Demokritos” in 2003-05), or in the University of Athens.

But it would be an injustice to the young Floratos not to mention his involvement in the other member of the academic ecosystem of Crete, the

**Foundation for Research and
Technology – Hellas.**

- **FORTH = ITE (Ίδρυμα Τεχνολογίας και Έρευνας – the two acronyms are synonymous) was the brain child of the distinguished Professor of Physics in Herakleion, E.N. (Leftéris) Economou (who also was its god-father).**
- **It was established in 1983, although under a different name – Research Centre of Crete (RCC) – as a refuge of research, which was exposed to the dangers of extreme politicisation of student and junior-teacher unions after 1982 that caused (and has ever since been causing) perhaps greater harm to Greek universities than the perennial shortage of funds.**
- **The RCC initially included three institutes (physics, biology, and computer science); two more institutes were added in 1985 (applied mathematics and Mediterranean studies in Rethymnon). Until 1987 the Center was a self-governed legal entity, but was also administratively connected with the UoC. As a result, political pressures mainly through the student unions, which were and are organised along political party lines, kept increasing.**

- **A major change took place in 1987. RCC, now renamed FORTH, was enlarged to include two Institutes of Chemical-mechanical Engineering in Thessaloniki and Patras respectively, and thus became a national rather than local research institution.**
- **But the most important change it secured at that time – not without considerable difficulty – was that it attained complete independence from the UoC. Yet, it continued to share researchers, labs and (mostly) graduate students with the University,**
- **and proceeded to evolve into an internationally recognised centre of excellence. Which, of course, reflected beneficially on the UoC also.**

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You have noticed, no doubt, that most of my time references so far have been to another period, another era almost, the 1980's and early '90's. This was due primarily to the subject of my brief presentation: the years that our honouree spent in Crete, and his contribution to what he himself considers “a miracle” that took place there (which, to some extent still holds, if we are to trust world university rankings, such as that of Leiden or the Times Higher Education Supplement). But there is more to it.

Floratos' career movements resemble those of many young scientists who, after the end of the seven-year “dictatorship of colonels,” started to return to Greece, particularly during the 1980's, in order to offer their badly needed services to the country.

Alas, the direction of the stream has reversed. We are nowadays witnessing an unprecedented brain drain, and all voices of reason to persuade the government that there is no hope for recovery from the present dire straits unless scientific research is supported in a serious way have been ignored.

Allow me to finish with an appeal to this conference to adopt a recommendation to the government and all political parties to make a commitment to support scientific research urgently and truly.