



In Memory of Georgios Stavrakakis
October 13, 1954 – February 27, 2015

On February 27, 2015, George Stavrakakis, a close friend and a great colleague passed away, after losing a sort but difficult battle with lung cancer. He was a consummate seismologist, who served science and earthquake research in Greece, united seismic networks and placed the bar high for earthquake science for the future. He also will be remembered as the Director of the Institute of Geodynamics of the National Observatory of Athens.

George Stavrakakis was born in the village Christos of Ierapetra, Crete on October 13, 1954. He studied Physics at the University of Athens (NKUA, 1978). He completed his postgraduate studies with diplomas in Germany (University of Münster, 1981), Japan (IISEE, 1985) and PhD at the University of Athens (NKUA, 1985).

George worked at the Organization for Earthquake Planning and Protection in Athens (1986-1987). In 1988, he was elected Assistant Researcher at the Institute of Geodynamics, National Observatory of Athens. In 1993, he was elected Senior Researcher, and, in April 1995, he was elected Director of the Institute. He served two consecutive terms as Director, until September 2008. In May 2009, he was elected Member of the European Parliament under the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) of Greece and served as Member of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (14/07/2009 – 30/06/2014). He was an extremely active MEP (ranked seventh in his term of service) serving two very important posts: Vice Chair of the Committee on Regional Development and Member of the Committee on Budgetary Control. With the first post he travelled the Regional Periphery of Europe and promoted solutions to deprived parts of Europe for development and innovation. After 2013, he was also very active in the Special Committee on the policy challenges and budgetary resources for a sustainable European Union.

George led numerous research projects in Europe and Greece and he served in several Committees for Earthquake Hazard Assessment and Risk Evaluation. He was an important advisor to the Greek State and the public. He was always considered the “voice of logic” during earthquake crises for the Greek public, and he was available 24/7, even as Director at the Institute of Geodynamics.

George will be remembered for his gentleness, patience, hard work, and serenity at the times of severe catastrophic earthquake events in Greece. His calmness and common sense were also invaluable at times of felt earthquakes with ongoing seismic activity and with many local residents in panic, and widely circulating rumors of catastrophes. He managed to bring all Greek seismologists on the same table of discussions and coordinated the first National Hellenic Unified Seismic Network. This was an achievement that only he could make happen, exactly because he was non-confrontational and logical. He was liked by the Greek public and the media for his calmness and politeness to inform with seriousness and scientific wisdom in times of earthquake crisis.

He had always given others the benefit of the doubt, even in times when the scientific community could not agree on issues related to evaluate ongoing earthquake crises, but he was respected and could bring everyone to agree to discuss. Yet, he was vigilant in protecting the Institute and the public from those who made provocative statements for personal promotion.

George will be greatly missed, particularly, since after the completion of his political carrier as MEP he had returned to seismology again and was seen as the catalyst for bringing scientists together in difficult times.

We lost a friend and a great colleague in research and public safety. He will remain an inspiration for his dedication to in both Seismology and the European Regional Development issues.

George was a good man, in the classic sense of the word, a loving husband and family man. His wife Mary, and their two sons, Nikos and Christos will miss him and we feel for them and this huge loss. It is honor to have had him a true friend and worked with him.

Nicos Melis
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