
Inspire Europe – September 30th 2020 opening remarks

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30/9/2020

Ladies and gentlemen,

Distinguished guests,

It's an honor to be here today. Thank you for inviting me.

We are here to discuss a very challenging but also very inspiring topic: how to support researchers at risk.

Sustainable Development Goal no 16 is very clear: “promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development; provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”.

Fighting discrimination is about defending human rights. But discriminating is also a serious economic loss for any organization, any company, any country.

We, at the General Secretariat for International Economic Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Enterprise Greece, have a clear mandate to boost the Greek economic ecosystem by creating international market opportunities and to promote the Greek brand abroad by repositioning Greece.

Sustainable development lies at the core of our efforts. In fact our new National Trade and Investment Strategy which has just been completed puts strong emphasis on the realization of

UN Sustainable Development Goals. To put it plainly our aim is to bring the SDGs into the mainstream and enhance the Greek business community in the process. We do that because we are convinced that this route offers a unique opportunity to effectively untap a hidden resource.

On June 25th, we organized the International Conference on Human Rights in Business which featured the Greek Prime Minister, the PM of Norway, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and other prominent government and international organization officials. For the first time in Greece and the Balkans a discussion on human rights and non-discrimination in the workplace focusing on the LGBT community was initiated at the highest political level.

Entitled “prosperity through diversity”, the conference highlighted that discriminating is not only an unquestionable human rights violation action, but also a major obstacle to economic development and productivity.

This is further supported by evidence provided by the InSPIREurope team:

According to the World Economic Forum¹, diversity brings many advantages to an organization: increased profitability and creativity, stronger governance and better problem-solving abilities. Employees with diverse backgrounds bring in their own perspectives, ideas and experiences, helping to create organizations that are resilient and effective, and which outperform organisations that do not invest in diversity.

A Boston Consulting Group² study found that companies with more diverse management teams have 19% higher revenues due to innovation than companies with below-average leadership diversity; 45% of total revenue versus just 26%. Evidence shows that diversity is not just a metric to accomplish; it is an integral part of a successful revenue-generating business.

Inclusion of researchers at risk, at any risk, either because of their sexual orientation, country of origin, race, or any other reason, can play a vital role in economic development by producing innovation and generating talent to business.

¹ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/04/business-case-for-diversity-in-the-workplace/>, 29 April, 2019

² <https://www.bcg.com/en-us/publications/2018/how-diverse-leadership-teams-boost-innovation>

This is why the InSPIREurope project is very important in bridging the gaps between national and European support mechanisms, but most importantly, between academic and non-academic sectors, to improve support for researchers at risk.

This support may entail incentives to researchers at risk such as:

- targeted EU fellowship programs including curtailed award criteria for researchers at risk
- accessibility through outreach and awareness raising of these funding mechanisms

The private sector should also be a part of this effort. Companies that wish to attract talent should develop fellowship programs for researchers at risk.

As a follow up of our International Conference on Human Rights in Business, an international action group with the participation of high profile organizations and international experts is under way.

It will propose concrete actions to adopt specific policy measures and campaigns in order to further promote and mainstream human rights in business in Greece and in Southeastern Europe. Inclusion of researchers at risk should and will be a part of it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world is evolving; we cannot miss out on talent and innovation. And when I say “we”, I refer to any organization: business, research or academic institution, the State.

As Fabrice Houdart, the Managing Director for Global Equality Initiatives at Out Leadership said during our conference: “change is not mandatory, because survival is optional”. The only organizations that will survive are the ones that will understand the evolving environment and will work for a better world.

Thank you very much