

Editor's Page

“Waiting for the Barbarians”

*Why is there so little action in the Senate?
Why aren't the Senators doing any legislating?*

*Because the barbarians will arrive today ...
Once the barbarians come, they'll do the legislating.*

C.P. Cavafy (1863-1933)



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Greece is being tossed by a financial and social storm, having failed to appreciate the risks and the prospects inherent in continuous foreign borrowing, uncritical and unwarranted opulence, and in particular poor productivity. Sad to say, but Greece, despite its high points and triumphs, has failed in its policies and choices, mainly through not having the forethought to armour itself against hard times.

Undoubtedly, the reality that is Greece includes us all. The responsibilities are collective ones.

Inevitably, however, those responsibilities must fall mainly upon the Guardians, those who were charged with the planning of political choices, decisions, and their implementation. Scientific institutions and universities also bear a major part of the responsibility for our current decline. They failed to act, hypocritically held their peace; and, worst of all, many of us who had the opportunity to intervene rarely had the courage, running the risk of marginalisation, to express ourselves directly and to draw a line in the sand.

Personally, I never sought particular political recognition. I was, though, President of the Medical School of the University of Crete and President of the Hellenic Cardiological Society. I certainly have to acknowledge my own responsibilities: why did I not protest more strongly? which decrees did I not issue and why not? why did I not resign when I recognised that a con-

tempt for meritocracy, an absurdity, a corruption, had taken charge of our lives?

In fairness to myself, I must report that sometimes I did speak out – in letters to top political appointees, in interviews and articles in the reputable press (e.g. *Vima*, 2003) – but I never received any reply. I was always ignored.

I would also like to point out that, from the day I enrolled in the University of Athens until today, I have lived – like all of us, I think – with the vice and the violence of an insistent mass that seeped through filters, broke laws, ignored elemental principles, in pursuit of its blind self interest. An example of the nitty gritty: after passing tough examinations for the Athens Medical School, the 380 successful first year candidates had to make room for another thousand, who had been turned into fellow students via unclear and opaque post-enrolment procedures instigated by the Junta.

Since then, the same reality has prevailed. Similar obscure procedures are everywhere. Nepotism in higher educational institutions is the rule. Wheeler dealers abound. Meritocracy is a rare commodity. The reign of the worst has become the norm.

Today, unsurprised and unquestioning, we are living through one of the penultimate acts of the drama. The universities and institutions continue to wait hopelessly and helplessly in the wings, spectators only.

It is a shame.