

What is the National Council for Education (ESYP)?

The National Council for Education (Ethniko Symvoulío Paideias - ESYP) is an autonomous advisory body for the Ministry of Education. ESYP was recreated in 2003 (FEK 114/12.5.2003 CONSTITUTION ORGANIZATION OPERATION ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT AND SEAT OF NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR EDUCATION) to guarantee the widest consensus possible on issues relating to educational policy and practices. The hope is to create a community forum where dialogue can occur between a diverse group of policy makers, academics and community members resulting in an amelioration of educational opportunities in Greece.

Who is a part of ESYP?

The National Council for Education (ESYP) is led by a President, who is proposed by the Minister of Education and endorsed by the Parliamentary Committee for Cultural Affairs. In addition to the president, ESYP is comprised of representatives from: other Ministries, various professional groups, university rectors and TEI (Technological Education Institutions) Presidents, the Center for Educational Research, the Pedagogical Institute, political parties, the Orthodox Church, teaching and research staff in higher education, the Confederation of Parents, the National Students Union, the Federations of Primary and Secondary School Teachers, the Confederations of Greek Industries. The current President of ESYP, Thanos Veremis, was appointed during the end of 2004 and will serve a three year first term.

Structure

The primary body of ESYP is the National Council for Education, which is led by president Thanos Veremis and consists of thirty-eight diverse members. In addition to the

National Council for Education there are three other committees that fall under the auspices of ESYP. Each of these committees has representatives from the political parties, academics, appropriate labor unions and government officials. First, there is the Council for Higher Education which consists of forty-six members including all (22) university rectors. Second the Council for Higher Technological Education, which is made up of thirty-nine members including all (16) presidents of the Greek Higher Technological Institutions among the other diverse members. Finally, there is the Council for Secondary and Primary Education which includes secondary education principle representatives, which consists of thirty-four members. The fact that these councils incorporate representatives from every facet of Greek society demonstrates ESYP's commitment to engage in the most diverse and dynamic dialogue possible.

In addition to these permanent bodies, ESYP has the capacity to create other committees in order to address a specific need. This allows ESYP to recruit those individuals with the greatest talent and expertise ensuring an enlightened dialogue and the best recommendations for the Ministry of Education. One notable example of a special committee is the group of eight men who proposed a set of reforms for the Greek higher education system. (These reforms are discussed in greater detail below.)

Current Reforms

ESYP was established by law 2327/1995 (FEK 156/31.7.1995 NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR EDUCATION – REGULATION OF SUBJECTS OF RESEARCH OF EDUCATION AND FURTHER TRAINING OF TEACHERS). Although the organization was initially dormant, in recent years it has become extremely active and has been tasked to create policy proposals for every level of education in Greece. ESYP will spearhead the effort to reform education in Greece so that it complies with EU standards -more specifically the

Bologna Agenda which was voluntarily signed by Greece in 2005. In April 2006, ESYP provided the Ministry of Education with a thirty-page report which suggests a series of reforms for higher education. The report takes into consideration the current political climate of Greece and offers suggestions that are both feasible and necessary. The table below taken from the Athens News highlights many key reforms from the ESYP report.

	Under current law	ESYP proposal
Asylum	Police are banned from entering campus grounds. A special "Asylum Committee" at each university, however, may decide to allow police to enter the grounds.	A rector's council should vote by a two-thirds majority rule.
Bibliography	University professors assign only one course textbook (usually their own).	Universities should create modern libraries so that students are able to borrow books for research and study purposes. ESYP also recommends extensive use of the internet.
Perpetual students	University students may spend their entire life earning a degree. [According to ESYP, there are nearly 150,000 students who have stayed long past the usual four or five years it takes to earn an undergraduate degree]	Students should be allowed to continue a maximum of 1.5 times their degree programme's normal length. They should also be allowed to interrupt their studies for up to four semesters (two years) for work purposes. The university should offer certain jobs (library, cafeteria etc) to economically assist less-well-off students who extend their degree. A student should automatically lose the right to sit exams after exhausting these time limits. Students who feel they have been unfairly failed three times may request a three-member committee to examine them and to see their marked paper. Students already enrolled in university should not be affected by the new measures, but they should be subject to a transitional period.
Election of university rectors	Voting power is split among three groups: teaching and research staff have 50 percent of the vote, undergraduate and graduate students have 40 percent of the vote and administrative staff have 10 percent. Effectively, however, the students often have greater voting power than the teachers and researchers because their 40 percent is inelastic, whereas the faculty's 50 percent is subject to reduction based on low turnout. Furthermore, students do not cast their ballot directly - they elect representatives who then vote for the rector. These representatives are pre-selected by the student union arms of Greece's major political parties.	Voting powers may remain as currently proportioned between the three groups (50/40/10), but all three groups should be subject to a reduction based on low turnout. Students will have a lowest possible threshold of 20 percent of the vote and administrative staff of 2.5 percent.
Adjudication, management	Disputes between university departments, faculty members and students are resolved by university authorities, the education minister or the Council of State - the country's highest administrative court.	The current system either lacks authority or takes too long. A dedicated ombudsman, consisting of a three-member committee to resolve differences between university departments, faculty members and students, should be created. The committee members will be elected by the current and former parliament speakers.

The report hopes to tackle many problem areas in tertiary education. Yet there are a few core problems that ESYP is trying to particularly target.

The first key problem is the influence of political parties in the University. The campus has become the playground and recruiting camp for political parties. ESYP strongly believes that as long as parties remain a prevalent and ubiquitous force inside academics students will become increasingly distracted and forget the real reason they are in college – to learn. A very vocal minority of political students have the ability to run the campus. Yet, instead of representing their fellow classmates, these students have become completely attached to the agenda of their party. The result is that a majority of students are disempowered and many campus practices are out of touch with actual student needs. ESYP believes that political parties have a strong role to play in the functioning of our government, but they should not be a dominant force in our universities.

Another core issue of the ESYP proposal is to create higher standards and stricter evaluation in tertiary education. Students in the previous system could stay in school forever, which has created the problem of lifetime students. Aside from the added cost to the state, lifetime students hurt themselves as they spend an excessive amount of time in university instead of advancing to the next stages of their lives. ESYP feels that by limiting the amount of time a student can spend in schools, universities can give students the incentive requisite for success. If a student is told that he must graduate in a certain number of years, he will work diligently and arduously to ensure that he meets the requirements to graduate. Yet, ESYP knows that for a variety of reasons not every student can graduate on time. For this reason the proposal limits the amount of time that a student can spend in university to one and a half times the length of their course of study (such that a student pursuing a four year course can spend up to six years in university.)

This example demonstrates how ESYF is willing to balance their reforms to work with the current conditions of Greek tertiary education.

Students should not face an increase in standards alone. ESYF knows that our university professors must also be evaluated to ensure that university classes can reach the highest standards. Just as students must attend lectures, so should professors. In order to guarantee that professors are doing their job, ESYF feels that students should be able to evaluate each of their professors at the end of every course. These evaluations will allow university officials to highlight those professors who are doing a great job and those who may need some improvement. Although many may dismiss these reforms out of a fear of evaluation and standards or simply due to a concern for change, these reforms are essential for both the short-term and long-term success of higher education. Without change a diploma from a Greek College may soon lose all value.

What Next?

ESYP is committed to improving the educational system at every level in Greece. Over the coming years, ESYF will continue to make proposals for reform to the Ministry of Education in order to sharply change and as a result vastly improve schools throughout Greece. The first goal was to reform higher education and it happened by the law 3549/2007 (FEK 69/20.3.2007). Then ESYF wants to move onto secondary education and to change the admissions process from secondary to higher education and finally we hope to fix our primary schools. ESYF will continue to engage the community as it proposes reforms for it knows that the best ideas will be those that have been discussed and debated through a rigorous, constant and diverse dialogue.

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