

The Idols of Young Greeks

In a column titled [“The Idols of Young Greeks”](#) and published in *Kathimerini*, December 31, 2010, Costas Azariadis and Yannis Ioannides express their disappointment that the extraordinary event that Christopher A. Pissarides, LSE, shared this year’s Nobel Prize in Economic Science received very little publicity by the Greek media. They proceed to speculate that this was not just a random oversight by the majority of the Greek media but was instead a troubling symptom of the low esteem that meritocracy enjoys in contemporary Greece. They go further and discuss one of the likely causes, namely the elimination during the 1980s of selective exam-based public schools in Greece. They recall a column published by Stathis Kalyvas, Yale University, *Kathimerini*, October 17, 2010 on selective public schools as well as their own proposals, also published in *Kathimerini*, October 17, 2010, on the urgent need for Greece to adopt radically new ways of “doing things.” They argue that the issue of meritocracy is not a minor luxury that might be easily dismissed as a matter of concern only when one contemplates long-run reforms. Instead, they argue, it is an important signal whose recognition is urgent and which should guide the public debate over the university reform process that the Greek Ministry of Education has initiated through its “Statement on Consultation”. They propose that as soon as the university reform gets under way, it behooves the Greek government to tackle the equally pressing matter of reforming the Greek primary and secondary educational system. The woeful absence of meritocracy is particularly glaring in the Greek public sector and a prime cause of the looming bankruptcy of the country.

Azariadis and Ioannides conclude by advocating the reestablishment of selective public schools (a relatively inexpensive proposition) in which where talented kids may be educated regardless of their families’ means. They regard this a decisive step in the return of meritocracy to contemporary Greek society. They conclude by stating:

“Let us try to help turn distinguished scientists into idols of young Greeks. Let us all rejoice at their extraordinary scientific and intellectual achievements. There certainly exist in our society young people with the intellectual abilities of an Odysseas Elytis (Nobel Laureate, Literature, 1979), George Seferis (Nobel Laureate, Literature, 1963) and Christopher Pissarides. Don’t we have to build institutions that will allow them to do great things for the benefit of all mankind?”