



February 3, 2021: A special day for Japan-Cyprus Academic Diplomacy, Exchange and Future Prospects



February 3, 2021, His Excellency Mr. Charis MORITSIS, Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus to Japan, visited the University of Tsukuba (UT) and Tsukuba City, the science city of Ibaraki Prefecture. The visit was a result of exchanges between the Ambassador and Dr. Alexis LYRAS, with the intention to bridge and strengthen academic partnership and collaboration opportunities between the Republic of Cyprus and the University of Tsukuba. During this day-long visit, Mr. MORITSIS was welcomed by Dr. Kyosuke NAGATA, President of University of Tsukuba, and this day will be recorded in history as the first day the Cyprus' flag was raised next to Japan's and University of Tsukuba Flags as a symbol of appreciation and collaboration prospects between Japan and Cyprus. President, Dr. NAGATA welcomed the Cypriot Ambassador at the headquarters of the university and exchanged ideas for future collaboration between the University of Tsukuba with educational and academic agencies from the Republic of Cyprus.



Prof. Hisashi SANADA (Chair of TIAS, and Director of CORE – Center for Olympic Research and Education) and Dr. Alexis LYRAS (TIAS, UT) joined this meeting to embrace and enrich the scope and the vision of the bilateral agenda. Dr Nagata *“highlighted the uniqueness of Tsukuba, a science city that was built on academic excellence and innovation and suggested the establishment of collaboration and exchange opportunities on a wide spectrum of departments and disciplines, ranging from Science, Artificial Intelligence, Technology to Environmental Studies, Medicine, Health, Humanities, Sport and Olympic Studies related topics”*. The Ambassador expressed his vision and intention to strengthen partnership and two-way exchange opportunities and highlighted that as we *“Imagine the*

*Future” (referring to the University of Tsukuba moto), our future is built on the **present- and expressed his intention to work closely with the University in order , to establish, step by step, a strong partnership, , starting with official MOU, and building a strategy for exchange programs and collaboration across academic disciplines and institutions.** Dr. Alexis LYRAS suggested a **wide range of initiatives and opportunities that could strengthen this partnership and expressed his commitment to build a long-term and sustainable strategy with programs that would benefit faculty, students and educators between both countries.** The President and Ambassador pointed the need of championing this initiative and **suggested to have Dr. LYRAS as a liaison for embracing and championing this initiative.***

The Ambassador stated that his next steps would be a solid plan of action with tangible steps forward. ***Prof. SANADA further supported this collaboration and highlighted his intention for closer collaboration on research, innovation and knowhow.*** The meeting concluded with a common understanding that the global pandemic requires new beginnings with bold ideas and innovation; whereas this is the right time to plan ahead for a new and impactful beginning, with respect to the nature and investments in the Human resources of tomorrow.

The day-long visit started at MIZUHONOMURA ICHIBA, a farmer’s market and a world-known institution for the high standards in community collaboration for quality assurance and sustainable agricultural development high standards; an agency and institution that reflects the values and tradition of the Japanese heritage and culture. Dr. Lyras welcomed the Ambassador with Mr. Thanassis Poulikkas, a University of Tsukuba graduate student from Cyprus who is currently pursuing his PhD at the School of Medical Sciences (Human Biology Program, HBP) with support from the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Dr. Lyras highlighted the symbolic meaning of the meeting point, mentioning that as we recover from the global pandemic, (1) it is important to start rebuilding our future with partnerships and collaborations and academic excellence that embrace high quality assurance standards and (2) going back to the basics. Slow down, build on relationships and values- with respect to mother earth and the environment. This is also the (3) essence of the **Olympic idea and the core of the Olympian Heritage.**



The Ambassador had the opportunity to discuss with Mr. Poulikkas who shared his experience at the University of Tsukuba’s Medical Center, his research on cancer and also the uniqueness of the experience by having the opportunity to work and learn in Japan. The Ambassador highlighted the need for **sharing these opportunities with other potential students and faculty in Cyprus (cooperation with the University of Cyprus as a starting**

point) and embrace two-way exchange opportunities and collaboration with multiple agencies throughout the island.

During the morning meeting, Dr Lyras shared the outline and rationale of multiple programs and projects initiated in Japan and Internationally. These projects were inaugurated as a world-wide Academic Legacy initiative in Sao Paolo in September 2016- replicated and expanded with programs, conferences, presentations, workshops and international Forums India, Greece, Cyprus, France, Argentina and the UK the last five years. All these projects were implemented with support from Sport for Tomorrow, as part of the Tokyo 2020 Games academic legacy project. These and more reports and sample of UT-TIAS led projects can be found on the TIAS website (<http://tias.tsukuba.ac.jp/external-activities/projects/>).

The second stop of the Ambassador's visit was at the Shrine at the Tsukuba Mountain, which according to the mythology its two characteristic peaks reflect the fatherly and motherly figures of the God (Amaterasu) that brought the first Japanese to the Land of the Rising Sun. Nowadays, students from the university are doing a 'pilgrimage' at the "mother peak" for a good fortune in their exams. The symbolic meaning on how Japan embraces their values and tradition, and how the continuation of their cultural heritage has created a prosperous, resilient, accountable and respectful culture. The analogy was also made that the Olympic Games were built on Olympus Mountain mythology, with symbolic meaning of excellence, spirituality and transcendence- how nature in other words, can embrace humanity and excellence across various domains in life. Virtues those are often lost in time and translation.



The third stop of this visit included a small tour at the premises of the University, at **Jigoro Kano's statue and museum, Sport and Physical Education Facilities, Tsukuba International Academy of Sport Sciences (TIAS) and the Global Sport (GSI) Innovation building.**





The day was concluded with a meeting where **Prof. Hisashi SANADA** welcomed and introduced the Ambassador with the TIAS Faculty. The meeting was primarily attended by **Prof. Randeep RAKWAL** and **Assistant Prof. Taro OBAYASHI**. The **Chair of the TIAS 2.0** (<http://tias.tsukuba.ac.jp/tias2/>) **Prof. Koyo FUKASAWA**, and the **Dean of the Faculty of Health and Sport Sciences, Prof. Takeshi NISHIYASU** also greeted and interacted with the Ambassador. During the meeting **Prof. SANADA** introduced the faculty to the Ambassador and provided a summary of TIAS history and future vision. **Prof. RAKWAL** provided a booklet with previous programs/projects and collaborations with various countries and suggested a follow up with a zoom meeting with Faculty and institutions we have already collaborated in CYPRUS as the next step, to brainstorm further collaboration and projects. **Dr. OBAYASHI** express his interest in engaging secondary school teachers and students in educational programs related to Olympic and Paralympic Educational programs and exchange programs and initiatives. Dr. Obayashi also suggested the opportunities that will arise with the host city Tokyo Games program and the ambassador reiterated. **Prof. RAKWAL** indicated the possibility of high-school children visiting UT affiliated schools and special schools and to have a field trip to the Tsukuba campus to learn more about its diverse campus and educational opportunities. The student exchange program with partner universities in Cyprus would be another exciting possibility showcasing each other educational institutions and cultures. Previously, graduate students from our university have visited University of Cyprus and CARDET on an Internship, which serves as a starting point for further exchanges.



Lastly, on February 4, 2021, during the TIAS Steering Committee, Prof. SANADA, gave the floor to Dr. LYRAS to inform the TIAS Staff and Faculty about the Ambassador's site visit and to elaborate on the scope and future prospect of this visit. Dr. LYRAS gave a short overview of the day-long visit and expressed his commitment to provide a detailed written report and a strategic planning document by the next TIAS Steering committee meeting on the March 3rd, 2021. Dr LYRAS mentioned that the report will be prepared in close collaboration and consultation with Profs. SANADA and RAKWAL, and His Excellency Mr. Charis MORITSIS.

Thank you,

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LINKS:

1. https://www.cy.emb-japan.go.jp/itprtop_el/index.html
2. <https://www.tsukuba.ac.jp/en/>
3. <http://www.taiiku.tsukuba.ac.jp/en/>
4. <http://tias.tsukuba.ac.jp/>
5. <http://tias.tsukuba.ac.jp/tias2/>
6. <http://core.taiiku.tsukuba.ac.jp/>
7. <https://www.sport4tomorrow.jpnsport.go.jp/>