Report on Visits to Schools in Athens, Greece

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1. Introduction

As part of the European Patent Office's commitment to fostering innovation and inspiring the next generation of inventors, I had initially planned to visit two schools in Athens. However, due to overwhelming interest from Greek schools, the visit expanded to four institutions, reflecting the strong enthusiasm among students and educators for discussions on science, technology, and innovation. These visits provided an exceptional opportunity to engage with students and share insights from my experience in the space industry, particularly as a European Inventor Award recipient in 2017. Each visit was a remarkable and rewarding experience, filled with enthusiasm, curiosity, and deep intellectual exchanges with students eager to explore the world of science, technology, and innovation.

2. Visit Details

February 24th, 2025 – Athens College, Psychiko

- Location: Stefanou Delta 15, Psichiko 15452, Greece
- Audience: Over 700 students
    - First group: 300+ students (ages 13-14)
    - Second group: 350+ Lyceum students (ages 15-18)
    - Final session: 50 students (mostly female) passionate about STEM
- The discussions covered diverse topics, including space exploration, engineering, and personal career journeys.

February 25th, 2025 – Arsakeio College, Psychiko

- Location: Arsaki 1, Old Palaio Psychiko, 15452, Athens
- Audience: Approximately 450 students
- Format:
    - A general speech to all students (ages 14-18) lasting over three hours, filled with questions on science, philosophy, and personal experiences.
    - Smaller round-table discussions with 16- to 18-year-old students preparing for university.
    - A final group of 50 female students passionate about space and science.

February 26th, 2025 – Arsakeio College, Ekali

- Location: Leoforos Marathonos 1, Anixi, 14569, Athens
- Audience: Approximately 350 students (ages 14-18)
- Format:
    - Morning discussions with students on diverse scientific and engineering topics.
    - Small-group discussions for students making career choices before university.
    - A dedicated session with 40 female students focused on space science and personal career journeys.

February 27th, 2025 – Greek-French College, Neo Psichiko

- Location: Psichari 10, Neo Psichiko 15451, Athens, Greece
- Audience: 100 students (ages 16-17)
- Format: A two-hour interactive session with engaging discussions and participation from both students and teachers.

3. Engaging Activities for Simplifying Complex Technologies:

During all visits, I aimed to make complex scientific and engineering concepts more accessible through:

- Multimedia presentations featuring videos on the European Patent Office, European Space Agency, Galileo satellite navigation, and space exploration.
- Practical demonstrations on satellite navigation and the significance of intellectual property protection.
- Interactive discussions showcasing the multidisciplinary nature of engineering and the humanitarian aspects of large-scale projects.
- Educational games rewarding participation with space-related goodies. These activities emphasized key technological principles, such as wireless networks and the contributions of women in STEM.

4. Key Messages Delivered

Throughout all school visits, I shared the following core insights with students:

- **The Evolution of Knowledge**: Knowledge is not static; it can be lost and rediscovered. I used the example of ancient Greek philosopher Democritus and the 20th-century "rediscovery" of atomic theory to illustrate how knowledge can be forgotten and later revived.
- **The Rise and Fall of Civilizations**: I highlighted how civilizations flourish when they invest in education and intellectual growth but can decline if they fail to pass knowledge to younger generations. Greece, once the cradle of Western civilization, is a prime example of how immense progress can fade if the continuity of knowledge is not maintained.
- **The Role of Critical Thinking**: I urged students to question everything and think independently, emphasizing that while AI tools like ChatGPT provide answers, true innovation comes from human curiosity and creativity.
- **Overcoming the Challenges of Knowledge Overload**: In today's world, students have access to more knowledge than any previous generation. However, simply having access to information does not mean understanding it. I emphasized the importance of learning how to analyze, interpret, and apply knowledge rather than just memorizing facts.
- **The Importance of Failure in Learning**: I reinforced the idea that failure is not a setback but an essential part of learning and progress. Every failure is an opportunity to gain knowledge and improve.
- **The Future Belongs to Those Who Dare to Dream**: Students were encouraged to think boldly and not fear challenging established ideas. History has shown that the greatest achievements come from those who think differently and take risks.
- **Women in STEM**: I emphasized that women bring unique perspectives to science and technology. My team at work consists of more women than men, not because of quotas but because they were the best candidates.
- **Europe's Role in Innovation**: I discussed how Europe has tremendous creative potential but must also protect its ideas. The European Patent Office plays a crucial role in safeguarding innovation.
- **Language and Cultural Exchange**: I encouraged students to learn languages, not just for career advantages but to develop a deeper understanding of other cultures and perspectives.

5. Impact on Students

- **Increased Enthusiasm for Science and Innovation**: Many students expressed newfound excitement about STEM fields, asking insightful questions and engaging deeply with the topics presented.
- **Awareness of the Responsibility of Knowledge**: Students resonated with the idea that they are the torchbearers of civilization. Many reflected on how they, too, must ensure that knowledge continues to grow rather than diminish.
- **Strengthened Critical Thinking Skills**: Students learned that education is not about passively accepting facts but about questioning, analyzing, and applying knowledge to solve real-world problems.
- **Encouragement for Female Students in STEM**: Female students felt particularly inspired to pursue careers in science and engineering, recognizing that their contributions are valuable and necessary.
- **Overwhelming Engagement and Curiosity**: Students asked so many questions that teachers had to intervene to conclude the sessions. The discussions often extended into break times, showing the deep interest the students had developed.
- **Interest in Future Opportunities**: Several students and teachers requested future visits and follow-up sessions to explore additional topics and career pathways.
- **Impact Beyond the Classroom**: Many students took the discussions to heart, discussing them with their peers and even teachers long after the sessions ended. Some began researching topics like space navigation, AI, and European technological advancements on their own.

6. Conclusion

The school visits in Athens were an overwhelming success, creating an atmosphere of intellectual excitement and inspiring future innovators. The combination of engaging discussions, thought-provoking challenges, and interactive activities left a lasting impact on the students. Schools expressed deep gratitude for the initiative, recognizing it as a turning point in many students' lives. These interactions underscored the importance of fostering curiosity, critical thinking, and a passion for knowledge among young minds, ensuring that they become the innovators of tomorrow.

7. Pictures from both visits

February 24th, 2025 – Athens College, Psychiko

Main hall of Athens College in Psychiko with one of the 13- to 14-year-old students groups

Separate talks to students from students from one of the 15- to 18-year-old students group

Standing in front of Athens College alongside the principal, key faculty members, and representatives of the Student Council

On stage in the main hall of Athens College

Continuation of discussions with students from the 15- to 18-year-old age group

February 25th, 2025 – Arsakeio College, Psychiko

In the main hall of Arsakeio College in Psychiko with a group of 14- to 15-year-old students

In the main hall of Arsakeio College in Psychiko with a group of 16- to 18-year-old students

Together with some of the students that remained to the very end

February 26th, 2025 – Arsakeio College, Ekali

Main hall of Arsakeio College in Ekali with one of the 14- to 18-year-old students groups

February 27th, 2025 – Greek-French College, Neo Psichiko

Focused discussions in separate meeting rooms with a group of 15- to 18-year-old students from the Greek-French College in Neo Psychiko

Engaging in further discussion with some students from the French-Greek school who stayed after the presentation

Example of some of the prizes given to students participating in the games (one of the several prizes given to female students). Every team got space bags and shirts and the captain and leader polo shirts with ESA related motives.

8. Social Media Mentions

8.1 Announcements and highlights from the visit to Athens College, Psychiko

On the website of Athens College, Psychiko:

https://www.athenscollege.edu.gr/en/news/our-news/2025/02/25/athens-college-junior-high-school---speech-to-high-school-3-students

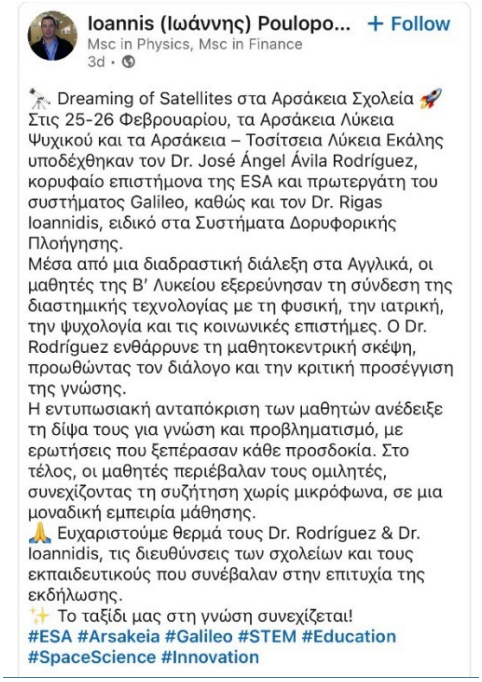
https://www.athenscollege.edu.gr/news/details/2025/02/25/gka-omilia-stous-mathites-tis-g-gymnasiou

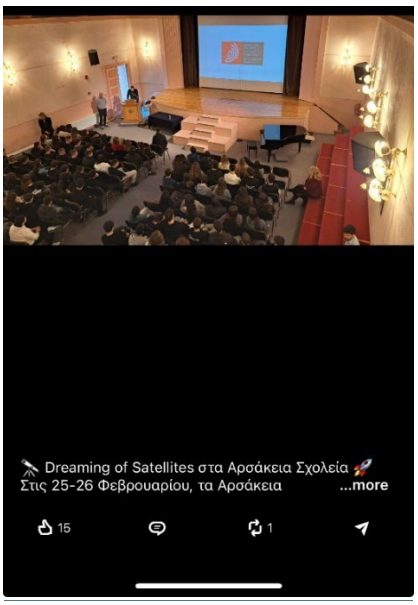
https://www.athenscollege.edu.gr/en/news/our-news/2025/03/10/dr-%C3%A1vila-rodriguez-gives-speech-on-the-european-space-agency-to-junior-high-school-and-high-school-students

8.2 Announcements and highlights from the visit to Arsakeio College, Psychiko

On X (formerly Twitter):

https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn%3Ali%3Aactivity%3A7302974937923776513/?midToken=AQHf6cWTnqi_CQ&midSig=2CKPnJ4H8tPrE1&trk=eml-email_notification_single_mentioned_you_in_this_01-hero_notification_cta-0-1ep~cta&trkEmail=eml-email_notification_single_mentioned_you_in_this_01-hero_notification_cta-0-1ep~cta-null-3mgfn8~m7vosmo2~tz-null-null&eid=3mgfn8-m7vosmo2-tz





On the website of Arsakeio College, Psychiko:

https://www.arsakeio.gr/gr/epilogi-thematon/54452-apo-ton-evropaiko-organismo-diastimatos-esa-sta-arsakeia

8.3 Announcements and highlights from the visit to Arsakeio College, Ekali

On the website of Arsakeio College, Ekali:

https://www.arsakeio.gr/gr/epilogi-thematon/54452-apo-ton-evropaiko-organismo-diastimatos-esa-sta-arsakeia

All these engagements further amplified the impact of the visits, spreading the key messages beyond the classrooms to a wider audience.