

OPINION

Translating science into policy

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The annual Delphi Economic Forum is mostly about geopolitics and economics, but, very wisely, its organizers always find space for some (even more) important issues that do not usually make it to the front pages. And at the latest forum (the 11th, which was a success, as always), one of the most interesting discussions concerned humanity itself, at the individual and collective levels, as it focused on how we can use the knowledge produced by science to live better and longer, and to protect the planet.

At last year's forum, the members of the School of Delphi initiative stressed that the health of the Earth and the health of humanity are bound together inextricably.

This year's panel concerned the results of a two-day meeting of the members of this collaboration between Harvard University's T.H. Chan School of Public Health and the Academy of Athens' Center for Public Health Research and Education, and representatives of government ministries, state services and producers. The initiative was established in 2024 with the aim of presenting knowledge and proposals to politicians and state officials so that they can be translated into credible policies.

This year's discussion, "From Science to Policy: Healthy Aging," focused on the potential and challenges of nuclear energy; climate change and environmental factors related to health and aging; the prospects, impact and controversies related to aquaculture; diet and food systems. All of these are related to each other and determine whether we will age in good health, and whether we will improve the prospects of humanity and the planet. At a time when short-sighted political expedience and economic uncertainty are conspiring to unravel many positive measures, it is important for politicians and citizens to know as much as we can about the dangers ahead and the policies that should be implemented.

Among the many conclusions of the discussion: Nuclear energy, which is presented widely as the solution to current energy insecurity, should be considered in the light of health risks. A recently published Harvard study found that in US counties where nuclear power plants had been established, there was a notable increase in cancer deaths (some 115,000 between 2000 and 2018) near the sites.

Professor Petros Koutrakis, senior author of the Harvard study, noted in response to a question that despite much talk about Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), their effects on health have not been studied because, essentially, they do not exist. On the issues of climate change and diet, it was noted that much knowledge has been gathered through large studies over a long period of time. What is important now is that the results of this research, and the authors' proposals, should reach a wider audience. Then politicians may be able to make difficult decisions, to turn knowledge into correct and necessary policies.

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