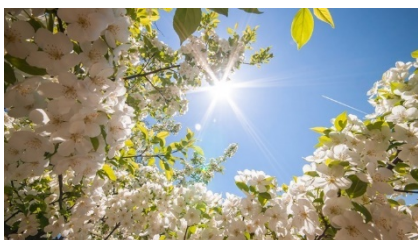


... TILL THEN, STAY SAFE

Patras was enjoying exceptionally warm January days. Trees in early blossom and



the Erasmus team of the 11th High school full speed preparing Patras exchange meeting. Some messages and bits of news had already started showing up from distant China about a virus, Coronavirus, a name unheard before; vast country, new things pop up all the time. Reluctant

whispers about this new virus arriving in Europe started coming late January.

Life went on in the 11th High school of Patras, exchanging messages and e-mails, painting classrooms, equipping computer and chemistry labs, rehearsing traditional dances and songs, booking hotels, hiring coaches, reserving restaurants, organizing host families, getting special permissions for ancient theatre and the official Olympic flame lighting ceremony, scheduling interviews with prominent Greek women even with an MP.....the list is endless.

We were doing our job, Coronavirus was doing his.

The first worried question was hesitantly raised: Are the Erasmus coming...?

Partners confused, students confused, families confused, NAs confused. No answer, whatsoever. Cancellations started bursting as well as cases all across Europe, slapping every country's face.

To fight for an Erasmus meeting?

The first reported case in Greece, Wednesday 26th February, official cancellations of Carnival celebrations, gatherings and parades nationwide. 4th March, the first reported case in Patras, schools closing on March 6th.

Initial student reactions: early holiday? Going out to parks and beaches. Exceptionally warm weather didn't assist social distancing. The spread of COVID-19 across Europe, however, calls for isolation. Circumstances are extraordinary, all classes are cancelled, foreign languages exams and all kinds of certifications postponed, when to? webinars and distance learning organized, online accounts activated. Life-saving confinement has been severely activated and the whole country is in quarantine, having to close European borders, the very borders which we have to vigorously defend against the Turkish threat. Airline companies have cancelled all flights, to and from, except for repatriation.

The whole country, as the whole of the planet, finds itself in a state of war and war calls for discipline, speed, readiness and effectiveness, incumbent upon us all – politicians, opinion makers, teachers, families, individuals. We find ourselves in the stringent restrictions ever announced – unprecedented but necessary- strictly adhered to by everyone sincerely and honestly, by us Greek people the extrovert, outgoing, rebellious, liberal and uncompromising. It is not easy for any free and normal society to function under such restrictions – but this case is nothing but normal.

Up until a week ago, it was a chore to be done. Now my dog's morning and evening walk is a gift, a blessing. Places that are universal symbols of optimism- classrooms, school yards, playgrounds- are almost radioactive today. In a nationwide lockdown,

having to complete a form or send an SMS to the Civil Protection Ministry when having to get out and being imposed a fine if otherwise, pale in comparison to being deprived of people.

Enough weeping...

Keep self-distancing, but, also, keep hoping. The whole world in battle against COVID-19. We will win, survive and meet again... **TILL THEN, STAY SAFE.**

Zetta Nikolopoulou

Teacher of English

11th Lyceum of Patras

PS. With the slogan Till Then #StaySafe, Marketing Greece has launched a new campaign inviting people to keep dreaming of all that Greece has to offer, even as the world battles the spread of COVID-19.