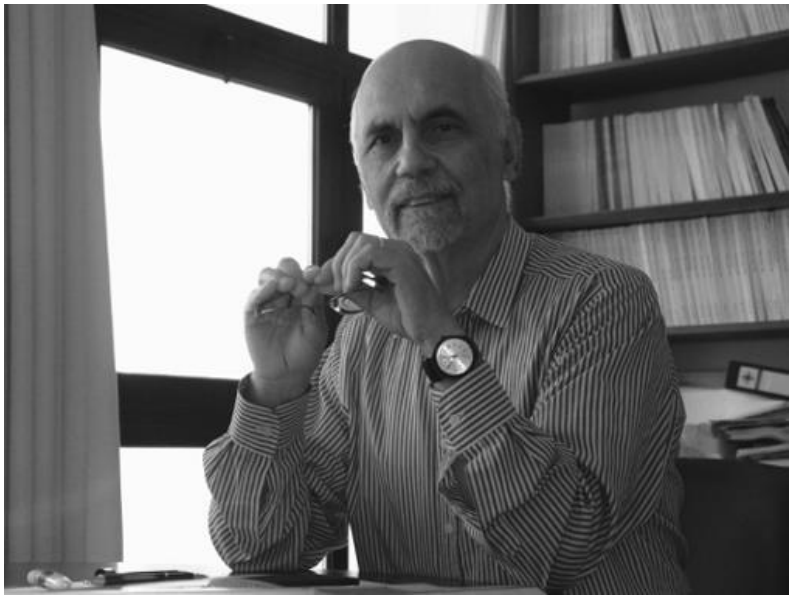
**Obituary**

**Fotis Kafatos**

**16th April 1940 – 18th November 2017**



With deepest sorrow we share the news that the founder and the first Director of our Institute passed away on November 18. 2017.
He was born in Herakleion in Crete in 1940. Upon completing his BSc degree at Cornell University he moved to Harvard University to continue his training in biology. After an impressive postdoctoral period, Fotis became the youngest professor ever appointed at Harvard at the age of 29.
Throughout his career, Fotis was one of the most prominent figures in biological sciences, through numerous important discoveries that had a huge impact on both fundamental and applied biology. He made tremendous contributions to molecular biology and genetics research. With his colleagues, he pioneered game-changing technologies for molecular biology, like cDNA cloning and the dot blot. His team was the first to clone an entire mammalian gene (the rabbit beta-globin gene), and to demonstrate that regulatory sequences are shared by evolutionarily distant species. He introduced molecular biology to the study of development by his groundbreaking discoveries on gene families (chorion gene families in both the silk moth and the fruit fly). These studies opened new horizons in developmental and evolutionary biology. His far-reaching vision is evidenced by his involvement in bioinformatics, as early as the 80's, long before it became common practice in the scientific community. From the mid-90s his research was focused on the biology of the malaria-carrying mosquito *Anopheles gambiae*. Working on this socially relevant topic produced significant results in the fight against this disease, which has a huge death toll, particularly in poor countries. Fotis was also one of the driving forces behind the Drosophila and Anopheles genome projects, which made important contributions to comparative and functional genomics. In the past decade his scientific interest was concentrated on the immune reactions of Anopheles. In collaboration with major research groups, he developed new concepts for the elucidation of the molecular basis of arthropod immune system function.

In parallel to the scientific contributions, which were recognized through countless distinctions and prizes, Fotis was also atremendous motivator and organizer actively serving the scientific community in many ways. Between 1972 and 1980, he organized and revamped the curriculum at the Biology Department of the University of Athens. Much of the current biology community throughout Greece can still trace its origins back to his teaching and generous support. In 1980s he was among the key people who established the University of Crete and the Foundation for Research and Technology Hellas, where he founded our Institute, the Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology (IMBB). Bringing in new ideas, administrative and educational structures, funds and, most importantly, promising young researchers, his vision to establish an internationally competitive molecular biology Institute has quickly become a reality. Setting the bar high in terms of scientific standards was, and still is the driving force of IMBB's success. Fotis continued to support our Institute even after leaving Crete from his position as the Chairman of the Institute's Scientific Advisory Council.

In 1994 he moved to Heidelberg to head the EMBL, one of the largest European research organizations. From 1993 to 2005, he helped to re-define and improve the institution by establishing new laboratories and outstations, the international graduate program and spin off companies. He has implemented new "inclusion" policies, particularly devoted to supporting and promoting equal opportunities for women and young researchers in Europe.

In 2006, he moved his lab to Imperial College London, where he continued studying the immune system of malaria-transmitting mosquitoes, in parallel to his efforts to create the European Research Council (ERC), a powerful funding instrument to promote excellent research, which revitalized the continent's research community. He served as president of ERC between 2007 and 2010.

Fotis has spent his whole career balancing his own research endeavors with efforts to create opportunities for other scientists. IMBB researchers have particularly benefited from his mentoring activities, which affected more than one generation of the Greek scientific community. For us at the IMBB and for those who had the privilege to know him, remembering Fotis will always be linked to the joy of doing science at the highest standards. He has left a rich and promising legacy to many generations of biologists. Building on this legacy, it is our duty now to see farther, for the sake of the future of Greek science.