

## **"Where are we today, nine months after last December's youth riots?"**

By Mina Todoulou, HELASYTH chair.

Election time in Greece and all the important topics of our society come again to the forefront. The signatures of the new government have not dried yet and the first signs of protest start to appear. The other day, in Kaisariani, a working class area of Athens, high school students gathered, put together on a paper their petition and decided to start a sit in protest. Parents came into our meetings alarmed. In the web-page of a coordinating body for youth struggle, protests are announced for mid October and early November. You may read slogans such as: *"We cannot go further with today's school: It puts us to sleep instead of equipping us; It exhausts us instead of training us; It costs us instead of enriching us;"* *"We want to learn! We want to live!"*. *"We will not participate in staged dialogue!; Dialogue will happen in the streets!"*

This brings us back to St Nickolas day, December 6<sup>th</sup> 2008, where the young generation exploded in the streets of Athens and other cities with lots of angry feelings about the societal conditions, the worries, the fears and insecurities about their future in a very insecure work, family and societal environment. It was a riot where teenagers combined with immigrants and dissatisfied citizens; the crowd started from no particular place and seemed to have no particular target. Its characteristic was raw anger, a bursting out of intense feelings. Bombing and fire targets were financial institutions such as banks, the political system –the parliament and offices of parties-, the education system -schools, universities-, police institutions symbolizing restriction and violence and symbols of consumerism such as shops in expensive shopping areas in the city. It was interesting that a lot of signals on the walls were written in English giving to the whole movement an international character. The internet played an important role through the network of the "low income generations" (G-700 for Greece, G-1000 for Spain etc).

It was quite a meaningful coincidence that on that day 6<sup>th</sup> of December 2008 – the Hellenic Association for Systemic Therapy had organized a one day conference at the Charokopeio University in Athens on "A Systemic Look at Breaking News: Individuals and Families in the New Reality of Work: Challenges and Opportunities." As HELASYTH, the recent years, we have made a point in creating scientific meetings with the intension of listening carefully at societal events that come in the forefront of public interest, like the peaks of waves in a rough sea, usually expressing in a very dense and intense way quite complex societal issues. It has been our experience so far that paying attention and exploring such events through scientific speech and discussion, equips us with more skills, "re-tunes" us to society's most recently developed "chords", opens up our senses,

hearts and minds to new ways of looking and handling what comes in our therapy rooms.

In our December 2008 such conference, we involved speakers from different sciences and points of view and members of the involved population, i.e. representatives from the work environment - businessmen, union leaders- and also young people in their 20s and 30s, members of the G-700 network, to present their work and no-work experiences, feelings, views and discuss among them and with us. The participating psychotherapists had the task to use this rich input towards creating constructive solutions through presentations and discussions in small groups. The focus was on how to turn all this for the better, through reframing, and through reviewing our basic life value guidelines.

The conference we had that day, predicted in a way the upheaval that burst out few hours later. From the discussions, the expressed feelings and points of view, it became obvious the hopelessness the youth had built within their hearts, with respect to work prospects and how these directly relate to their whole life: the difficulty to leave the parental home and create their own families, along with their stated lack of skills in forming and keeping intimate relations for a long time, and finding a way of life and a job that relates to what they want, what they can do, what they have been prepared for through their training and university education.

SKAI news reporter Kostas Raptis approached us - the family therapists - in great surprise for the fact that the conference discussions, theme and problematic that was developed, were so close to the reality of this movement and outburst, as if hearing beforehand the alarming signs and proceeding to build a network that would process all the relevant information, explore alternative solutions and propose action plans.

You may read journalist Kostas Raptis' introduction and then refer to his interviews on December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008 on Skai.gr web page, of:

Christoforos Vernardakis, Ph.D.,- Political Scientist, VPRC Research Institute, speaker in the Conference of HELASYTH and

Mina Todoulou, Ph.D.- Psychologist-Psychotherapist, chair of the Hellenic Association for Systemic Therapy (HELASYTH), chair of the conference

Haritini Karra- psychologist-family therapist, member of the Conference Scientific Committee.

Most texts were translated in English for the EFTA newsletter.

Furthermore, with a similar intention, in Leipzig last June in our NFTO chamber meeting, we turned our focus of discussion at what happens in our respective societies, that is brought forth in the breaking news in each country and comes into our therapy and training rooms, as we did at the EFTA Glasgow conference in our NFTO symposium two years ago. Participants worked in small groups with enthusiasm and produced short

presentations on the common themes that we all have previously agreed upon as most important, paving the way for interesting workshops and symposia in the upcoming EFTA Paris Conference next October. You may read some of these paragraph presentations in this issue of the EFTA newsletter.