

Greek biomedical engineer receives top award at age 25

Eleni Antoniadou is 25 years old and is already the co-founder of a company, Transplants without Donors, where she is also chief of scientific research. She spends half the year in Chicago and the other half in Silicon Valley, working on three separate projects, while also volunteering her time for humanitarian aid missions in Latin America.

This accomplished young scientist was voted Woman of the Year for 2013 at the annual British-based FDM Everywoman in Technology Awards, which took place in London on March 19, organized by the FDM Group, which specializes in recruitment and hands out the award annually to promote excellence among female scientists.

"If you don't chase your dreams, you will never get a hold of them," Antoniadou told Kathimerini via Skype in between lectures at the University of Illinois, where she teaches bioengineering. "This distinction was a major surprise."

Even though the FDM Everywoman in Technology Awards are normally granted to British citizens, it is not the first time that the Thessaloniki-born Antoniadou has beaten the odds.

"A few years ago, when I first talked about creating artificial tissue and neurons, people were shocked at the suggestion, believing it to be the stuff of science fiction," she said.

Antoniadou began her studies at the IT and Biomedical Applications Department of the University of Central Greece in Lamia.

Following her graduation in Greece, she headed to Britain, where her academic career really took off.

"In 2009 I had the honor of being selected to work on the research team of one of the top scientists in modern medicine, Professor Alexander Seifalian, at University College London," explained Antoniadou. "Together with my classmate Claire Crowley, we developed a tissue engineered trachea and a business

plan so that this experimental product could become a clinical product."

The joint project was awarded the top prize at UCL's Translation to Clinic and to Commercialization of Nanotechnology Products Competition.

Elsewhere in the UK, a 36-year-old patient suffering from late-stage tracheal cancer heard of the project and approached the scientists.

"He got in touch with us and asked whether the artificial trachea could be used as a transplant. We were extremely guarded as we hadn't yet held an in vivo trial," said Antoniadou, adding that the patient was willing to take the risk and the surgery was successfully carried out a few months later.

"He often expresses his gratitude to use, but the feeling is mutual because my life changed as well," said Antoniadou.

This case was the first successful artificial organ transplant in the history of medicine and the publications that came in its wake, as well as the founding of Transplants without Donors, brought a barrage of job and research proposals to the young Greek scientist, who eventually succumbed to the allure of the United States, where she is currently working on her PhD at the University of Illinois after receiving no less than nine scholarships to do so.

"I am the only woman in my department and the only European as well," she told Kathimerini. "The competition is intense, and I must admit that it took a bit of extra effort to be accepted as a Greek."

Meanwhile, in 2012, Antoniadou was selected from among 1,200 students to do a course at the NASA Ames Academy for Space Exploration, landing a job at the Center for Nanotechnology and Mars Exploration at Silicon Valley.

"We study the changes in the nervous systems of astronauts, whose sense of orientation and balance is affected by the change in atmospheric pressure," explained Antoniadou. "We have also



discovered that we can grow tissue faster in space thanks to the lack of atmospheric pressure, something that could really revolutionize the field."

Though some of her work may be about Mars, Antoniadou's focus remains firmly on helping ease human pain, which is also the main objective of the company she co-founded.

"In the company, which has branches in Britain and the United States, we have engineers and scientists, and we have already succeeded in growing arteries,

skin, nerves, tracheas, ears and noses," explained Antoniadou. "Our work is aimed at cancer patients or people who have been in accidents."

Antoniadou admits that all the work means that she has little private life to speak of, yet she is determined to pursue her vision.

"I have seen children in Peru who were kidnapped for their skin," she said. "Such things make me dig in my heels even more to continue my research at any cost."

Nicosia to seek escape clause in bailout pact as IMF joins rescue

On the day that the International Monetary Fund agreed to participate in a funding package for Cyprus, the crisis-hit country saw the swearing-in of a new finance minister, while Nicosia pledged that it would try to insert a clause in its bailout agreement with its creditors for disengagement from outside monitoring once it has repaid its loans.

Cypriot government spokesman Christos Stylianides stated on Wednesday that President Nicos Anastasiades would try to insert a clause in the rescue deal according to which in the case that Nicosia finds the money to repay the 11.2 billion euros it will borrow, it will be able to disengage itself from the European Stability Mechanism.

Averof Neofytou, the alternate president of governing party Democratic Rally (DISY), struck a more populist chord yesterday, saying that "the troika can go to hell once we have found the money we need."

Berlin expects the memorandum of understanding between Cyprus and its prospective creditors to be ready by next Tuesday, ahead of the Eurogroup meeting in Dublin on April 12 and 13: "There is no finished MoU on the table that we can evaluate," stated German Finance Ministry spokesman Martin Kotthaus. "I expect that on

April 9 we will have this whole package," he said, adding that the German parliament could vote on the aid package in the week beginning April 15.

The package will include 1 billion euros from the International Monetary Fund, which announced its participation on Wednesday while expressing satisfaction with the content of the staff-level agreement with Nicosia.

"This is a challenging program that will require great efforts from the Cypriot population," IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde said in a statement. "We believe that it provides a durable and fully financed solution to the underlying problems facing Cyprus and provides a sustainable path toward a recovery." In a joint statement, Lagarde and European Union Economic and Monetary Affairs Commissioner Olli Rehn said they "stand by" Cyprus.

This came after Harris Georgiades, until this week alternate finance minister and minister for labor, was sworn in on Wednesday morning as the new finance minister, replacing Michalis Sarris, who resigned on Tuesday.

He promised that the government will adhere to all the terms of the MoU.

CYPRUS COMMUNISTS DO NOT RULE OUT EURO EXIT

Cyprus should weigh whether it is in its interest to abandon the euro, the leader of the Mediterranean island's second-biggest party was quoted as saying on Wednesday.

Nicosia should not rule out leaving the euro and consider it as an option, Andros Kyprianou, secretary general of the communist AKEL party, said in an interview with the semi-official Athens News Agency.

"We do not hold absolute views on the issue of the euro exit," Kyprianou was quoted as saying. "It remains on the table as an option. It requires careful study and planning," he added.

Several Cypriot deputies, including from AKEL, had aired similar views in recent parliamentary debates, after the eurozone imposed severe losses on the island's bank deposit holders as a condition for a 10-billion euro bailout.

AKEL controlled Cyprus's previous government under former President Demetris Christofias, which lost power in an election in February.