

Ivan Kolev, Nuran Direk, Florina Oğret, Gerd Gerhardt, Józef Niżnik

International Philosophy Olympiad



IPO

Spirit and Pathways

Since 1993

Ivan Kolev, Nuran Direk, Florina Oğut, Gerd Gerhardt, Józef Niżnik.

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Foreword

We wrote this book with the "opera aperta" (Umberto Eco) in mind – the thought-provoking book that becomes more and more meaningful through the reader's interpretive perspectives, free from judgments of value or of appropriateness. In its core, this concept expresses our purpose, the intention with which we wrote, and the purpose of the book.

At first sight/reading, the book contains personal histories – of ours, of those who, 30 years ago, founded the International Olympiad of Philosophy. Obviously, we assume these stories and the way we tell them. They reflect the way we remember the early years of the IPO, but also the way we live those memories now – from the perspective of the changes that have happened in the last 30 years in our countries and in the world, and the kind of reflexivity we have come to now, when we are supposed to have become wiser.

The book is, however, an "open work".

The professional and life experiences we are telling about are, undoubtedly, similar to the experiences lived by many other philosophy teachers in the world, or to the experiences they could live.

When we first met, we came from different "worlds" – from Bulgaria and Romania (two former socialist states in South-Eastern Europe), Turkey (a relatively young capitalist state with many peculiarities), Poland (a former socialist state closer of Western Europe through culture and religion), Germany (a consolidated Western capitalist state). What made possible the real communication between us and the construction of the IPO was the conviction that the philosophical education of the new generations is an absolute necessity and that we can contribute to its realization through the IPO. How? Preparing students for participation in the Olympiad, changing the way of teaching philosophy so that it becomes highly meaningful for

students' way of thinking, initiating local, regional, national philosophy competitions, hosting an IPO, overcoming inertia and the opposition of some people, sometimes, of the system as a whole; that is, through huge efforts made day by day, year by year. And we succeeded.

The world today is not radically different, at least at its grass root, than it was back then – the same inertias, the same obtuseness/closed mind of some people (see *The fundamental laws of human imbecility*, Carlo M. Cipolla, along with Bertrand Russell's observation: "The trouble is that fools these days are incredibly sure of themselves, and intelligent people have nothing but doubts."), the same other priorities and urgencies of the system than philosophical education.

Therefore, our stories are an opening, an expectation of a continuation, a support, an encouragement. The book wants to be a reason for hope.

We thank Ivan Kolev – who first brought us together 30 years ago – for printing this book.

The authors

Ioanna Kuçuradi

Honorary President of FISP



To the Reader,

It is a pleasure for me to introduce this book, consisting of the meaningful initiative of a small group from Bulgaria, Germany, Poland, Romania and Turkey to organize the Philosophy Olympiads in the beginning of the last decade of the 20th Century.

Among the many things that I had the opportunity to observe during my years in the administration of the International Federation of Philosophical Societies (FISP), was also the fact that the educational systems of many countries aim, in the best of the cases, at developing certain intellectual capacities of the individuals, but only very few take care to help them develop also their ethical capacities and sharpen the eye in order to become able to see what they are looking at.

In order to achieve this, the institutionalization of the Philosophy Olympiads at the national level, as well as the international level, appears to be crucial.

Thus despite the differences in the organization of the national olympiads, I suggested that the International Philosophy Olympiads (IPO) be held under the supervision of the International Federation of Philosophical Societies (FISP) and under the auspices of the Philosophy Division of UNESCO.

By doing this, I wished not only to guarantee the objectivity in the competition, which is a *sine qua non* condition for the fulfilment of the objectives of organizing IPO, but also to underline its worldwide importance.

I congratulate the mothers and fathers of IPO and I wish the increase of the participating countries, so that the work done for these Olympiads can contribute to realize that *should not* “anything go”.

Istanbul, February 2023

PART I.

The beginnings of the IPO

Ivan Kolev

Sofia University, Bulgaria



I primi lumi

I primi lumi

The first International Philosophy Olympiad was held in 1993 in Bulgaria. This initiative was born at a seminar, part of the program of Philosophy for Children, organized in the summer of 1992 in Varna, Bulgaria. The workshop featured Ann Sharp, an associate of Matthew Lippman, creator of the Philosophy for Children methodology. Nuran Direk and Florina Oțet attended this seminar. They were interested in the Philosophy Olympiad and we invited them in 1993 to join with their students. To our great joy, they came and this was the beginning of the International Philosophy Olympiad. At that time there were two national Olympiads taking place: one in Bulgaria and one in Poland. Both took place simultaneously but independently in 1989, several months before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In Bulgaria the initiative for the International Philosophy Olympiad emerged in 1988 as a means which the philosophers at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” used to further the process of liberalization in Eastern Europe and start teaching classical philosophy in schools. The goal was to replace the Marxist-Leninist subjects taught and rather dominant in Bulgaria all throughout the era of socialism (1947–1989).

If I have to point out the "arche" of the Philosophy Olympiad in Bulgaria, I can say that the idea of initiating such an Olympiad came to me in June 1988. One day in the National Library, I was reading the newspaper *Le Monde* and I saw that a text had been published which had scored the highest marks in the French baccalaureate. I was so impressed by the fact that I was seeing a student's text in philosophy in such a prestigious newspaper that I sincerely envied the French students for having such an opportunity and wondered whether something could be done in this direction in Bulgaria as well. At that time I was a first year assistant professor at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Sofia University. Kliment Ohridski". I graduated in philosophy in 1986 and in June 1987 I won a competition for an assistant professorship in philosophy. It was interesting, even symbolic, that in this competition there were two places for philosophers and the other one chosen in the in the competition for assistants was Stoyan Assenov, with whom we were among the organizers of the Philosophy Olympiad in Bulgaria all the following years.



*The Third Philosophy Olympiad in Bulgaria, 1991,
On the foreground: Ivan Kolev, Alexander Andonov, Stoyan Assenov*

Another motive for the Philosophy Olympiad was the idea of play (*agon*). From the books of Johann Winckelmann (*History of the Art of Antiquity*, 1764) and Johan Huizinga (*Homo Ludens, a study of the play element in culture*, 1955) I had become convinced that play and competition are a very successful way of creating a highly developed culture. And since at that time a process of political liberalization was beginning in Bulgaria, many of us were considering how to contribute to a faster development of education. So the idea of a Philosophy Olympiad seemed to me something that could make a big contribution in that direction.

The success of the first Olympiad was so enthusiastic that immediately after it took place I thought, what else can be done with *agon*? Political liberalisation included first steps towards economic liberalisation. So I thought it would be good to encourage education in economics as well as philosophy. So in the summer of 1989 I approached leading Bulgarian economists with the proposal that we should create an economics game that would educate students, and the wider public, in economic thinking and in initiative in the field of economics. By the end of 1989, the game was ready and its creation coincided with the end of the communist regime, which is associated with the date of 10 November 1989, when the decade-long communist leader Todor Zhivkov was ousted from power. The game was called "Business Stock Exchange Bank." A version of it is still circulating in Bulgaria. One of my co-authors of the game became a member of the Grand National Assembly, which adopted Bulgaria's new democratic constitution, and was chairman of the Economic Committee in parliament, while another founded the Open Society Foundation in Sofia. The picture below shows the economic game that followed the Philosophy Olympiad.



Particularly great contributions to the sustainability of the Olympiad in Bulgaria and the first International Olympiads from Bulgarian colleagues are made by Stoyan Assenov, Alexander Andonov, Aneta Karageorgieva and Raicho Pozharliev. At the very first Olympiad in 1988-1989 there were 210 participants. Years ago the average number of participants was 800-1000. To our joy, the participants were not only from a small number of schools and only from big cities. There were participants in the national round even from schools in villages.

Not a few of the winners of the Olympiad in Bulgaria became famous names in Bulgarian science and art. There are university professors, teachers, directors, film critics, businessmen and others.

The first International Olympiad was held in **1993** in Smolyan, Bulgaria (1). Three international teams participated, representing Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey. In the second edition of the Olympiad, in **1994** in Petrich, Bulgaria, the teams of Germany and Poland joined. At the third edition in **1995** in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria, the participants voted for every future edition of the Olympiad to be held in a different country, under the supervision and guidance of the International Committee (IC). I was elected as permanent secretary of the International Committee. In 1999, at the meeting of the organizers at Robert College, Istanbul, it was decided that the organizers with the greatest merit for the origin and establishment of the Philosophy Olympiad should be named "founders of the IPO": Ivan Kolev (Bulgaria), Gerd Gerhardt (Germany), Katalin Havas (Hungary), Wladislaw Krajewski (Poland), Florina Oțet (Romania), Nuran Direk (Turkey). The Department of Philosophy of Sofia University, as the organizer of the first three International Philosophy Olympiads, was appointed as the secretariat of the International Philosophy Olympiad.

Topics

The task of the contestants is to write an essay on one of the four topics they receive.

The representatives of each participating country have the right, and are encouraged to use that right, to send to the secretary general of FISP, no later than 1 March, their suggestions for topics to be included in the four topics at the contest. Among all these suggestions and those of the members of the Steering Board, the representatives of FISP at the Steering Board determine the four contest topics.

The topics may be quotes by philosophers or statements, formulated by the Committee. The quotes may be no longer than five lines. There are no limitations on the circle of philosophers whose quotes may be selected. The criteria for evaluation are defined in such a manner that the contestants need not know the specific philosopher, school of thought, or paradigm. This is necessary to be guaranteed because the philosophy curricula in different countries vary a lot and thus no specific common area may be defined from where the topics may be selected.

The contestants are not required to present or discuss other ideas of the philosophers on whose quote they are elaborating. It is permissible that quotes by less known or completely unknown philosophers are used because the contestants are not required to discuss the overall ideas or views of the author. The successful essay may discuss the topic as completely isolated from the author or the context.

FISP

Very important was the support the IPO received from the world philosophical organisation FISP.

First was Prof. Ioanna Kuçuradi, and after her all the following presidents of FISP helped IPO – Prof. Peter Kemp, Prof. William McBright, Prof. Dermot Moran and Prof. Luca Cosantino. The inclusion of FISP has increased the visibility and credibility of IPO, and the participation of FISP representatives in the SB has contributed to the selection of appropriate topics and also to the objective and accurate evaluation of the texts.

Personalia

Professor Krajewski's notebook. One of the bright faces in the IPO was Professor Wladislaw Krajewski. He was a very cordial person and we had many philosophical conversations with him. He would discuss with great interest the topic, "Is philosophy a science?" When the IPO was held in Poland, Prof. Krajewski and Prof. Niznik showed us the building of the Institute of Philosophy, where the famous names of the Lvov-Warsaw School worked. In the building there were portraits of all of them, about whom our colleagues told us. Later I met Professor Jan Wolenski, the author of the book " Logic and Philosophy in the Lvov-Warsaw School", from which I learned a lot more about this school. I was particularly impressed by the account of how Polish

philosophers who had fallen into German captivity during the Second World War had lectured on philosophy to each other without falling into despair.

During the International Olympiads prof. Krajewski carried a notebook with him. I asked him what he wrote down. He told me that the pages of the notebook were cut in two. On one side he wrote down the number of monuments dedicated to figures of the sciences and arts, and on the other side he wrote down the number of monuments dedicated to figures of the military. He explained to me that if, after visiting a city, the number of monuments in the first column was greater than those in the second, he argued that this was an indicator that "this city was a good place to live." Its benign character was entirely consistent with the design of this study of his.

The cordial Katalin Havas. The founder of the Philosophy Olympiad in Hungary was professor Katalin Havas, a philosopher-logician. She had a very successful textbook on logic. I remember in 1999 during the IPO in Hungary she showed us where George Lukacs lived and it was very interesting for me to see his office in a building on the banks of the Danube. In one of the conversations with prof. Havas we had gathered several people from different countries and she went from one language to another. At one point she said, "Now I particularly understood that the Philosophy Olympiad had become really international because I couldn't go quickly from one language to another". Indeed, in the first Olympiads with Nuran and Florina we spoke French, but at the beginning of the new millennium the countries became quite numerous and English became established as the main language for communication between us.

The ever-busy Juha. Among the colleagues from Finland, Juha was especially full of energy. His tall figure stood out in the crowd of participants and teachers. He was always busy and very responsive. Peka Elo and Juha not only created a strong National Olympiad and strong performances in the International Olympiad, but also initiated the Baltic Essay Competition, which was also very successful.

Solidarity in German. In the period 1998-2008, the participation of the Bulgarian team in the IPO was on a voluntary basis, because no institution provided financial support to the team. Unfortunately for us, at that time the 4 Olympiads were on other continents, which created additional complexities. In that period we proceeded like this. After the National Olympiad rankings were ready, we would start reading the students' names in descending order and ask each of them if they were likely to find travel funds. The first two who answered

positively were included in the team. But it wasn't just international travel that was complicated. For the 2000 IPO in Germany, at the last moment it turned out that the school from which the first two participants were unable to find funds. I only found out about it when we met the students to buy tickets at a tourist office. In order not to ruin the trip, he had to take an urgent personal loan from my sister. She also graduated in philosophy, but she worked in a company and had the opportunity to help us. For cheaper, we traveled combined by plane and train Sofia-Münster. Fortunately for us, the Bulgarian students performed surprisingly well in Münster and this did not happen again in the following years – they took a gold and a bronze medal. Then, under the impression of a reversal, I told Gerd Gerhardt what situation we were in. To our surprise, after the award ceremony, the German hosts made a big gesture and covered our travel expenses. I tell this case very often to students and teachers, so that they understand, firstly, that IPO also means solidarity, and secondly, to believe that even in the most complicated situations, fate can come to their aid.

The Impact of the IPO on School Education

Prior to the political changes in November 1989, philosophy was absent from school curricula in Bulgaria. Aesthetics or Logic was studied only in short periods. Thanks to the success of the first Olympiad, the organization of which began in October 1988 and the competition at the national level was held on June 3, 1989, in which, to the surprise of the organizers, 210 students from dozens of schools participated, a very favorable attitude as a people was formed in the Ministry of Education organizers of the Olympiad. Therefore, the first philosophy program for the secondary school in the new political conditions was assigned to me, and in February 1990 the program was ready.

In the following years, thanks to the efforts of dozens of university professors of philosophy and many teachers from the leading schools in the country, and with the full support of the inspectors in charge of philosophy at the Ministry of Education (Lyudmila Dragoeva, Dimitar Petrov, Albena Chupetlovska and Kosta Kostov), the philosophical curriculum was constantly stabilized and enriched. At present, the philosophy classes in school are distributed as shown in the table. This curriculum makes it possible to have a full-time philosophy teacher in every ordinary secondary school and enough philosophy students for the five philosophy departments in the largest Bulgarian universities.

Philosophy and Religion

In 2018, the Ministry of Education introduced *Religious Education* from Grades 1 to 12 as optionally courses with 1 hour per week. Students can choose between three options: *Religion (Non-Confessional Education)*, *Religion (Orthodoxy)* and *Religion (Islam)*. I was involved in the design of the *Religion (Non-Confessional Education)* curriculum, which is presented in the table below. For students in grades 1-4, the Philosophy for Children methodology was used. The children do not study the Bible (for children) or the Catechism, but discuss various everyday situations they encounter with reference to examples and histories taken from the Bible or from the lives of the saints. So the philosophical ideas of 'existential situation', 'exploration', 'encounter', and 'dialogue' are guiding. Thus indoctrination and dogmatics are avoided.

The realization of these ideas can be easily seen in the topics studied by children grades 1-4:

Grade 1 Religion (Benevolence): *Trust and Friendship, Trust and Faith, Generosity, Caring.*

Grade 2 Religion (Benevolence): *Compassion and Charity, Kindness and Duty, Respect and Esteem, Love for the Other.*

Grade 3 Religion (Benevolence): *Purity and Holiness, Temperance and Humility, Patience and Duty, Hope.*

Grade 4 Religion (Benevolence): *Faith and Superstition, Forgiveness, Justice and Solidarity, Wisdom.*

As can easily be seen all the concepts that define the basic content of the subject of Religion Grade 1-4, are from the vocabulary of philosophical ethics. Their "definition" of life situations is a good introduction to the philosophical thinking that children discover spontaneously and through the methodology of *Philosophy for Children*.

Conclusion

So far I have participated in absolutely all the Philosophy Olympiads held without missing a single one – 34 national and 30 international. When I finished this text in March 2023, the sum of the two numbers was exactly equal to my age. Whether it was chance or destiny I do not know, but I am happy that I could contribute at least a little to philosophy having two

such large-scale annual events. I found these events very inspiring. When I attended Hans-Georg Gadamer's 100th birthday celebrations in Heidelberg in 2000, I had the chance to talk to him a little bit and he said to me, "I know it is difficult in your country now. But do not despair. Work for the philosophical culture." The IPO and Gadamer's words were a strong incentive, and maybe that's why I've been able to publish over 80 books on philosophy or art, of which over a third are authored.

These events not only support philosophy education but also bring much joy to all who participate in them. The smiles on the faces in the meetings, in the memories, and from the photos are the best testimony that the time and effort put into the IPO are justified.

Bulgaria – Philosophy in School

Grade	Mandatory courses For all schools in Bulgaria	Optionally courses	
		<p style="text-align: center;">Philosophy Colleges</p> <p>80 schools Starts from 2020/2021 school year</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Religion</p> <p>For any school in which the school board decides</p>
12	<p><i>Civic Education</i> – 1h per week</p>	<p><i>Philosophy and Politics</i> – 1h per week</p> <p><i>Philosophy and Values</i> – 2h per week</p> <p><i>Personal Psychology</i> – 1h per week</p> <p>One more subject by teachers choice</p>	<p><i>Religion (Religious Aesthetics)</i> – 1h per week</p>
11	<p><i>Civic Education</i> – 1h per week</p>	<p><i>History of Ideas</i> – 2h per week</p> <p><i>Culture of Thinking</i> – 1h per week</p> <p><i>Social Psychology</i> – 1h per week</p> <p>One more subject by teachers choice</p>	<p><i>Religion (Religious Anthropology)</i> – 1h per week</p>

Grade	Mandatory courses For all schools in Bulgaria	Optionally courses	
10	<i>Philosophy</i> – 2h per week	-	<i>Religion (Religious Ethics)</i> – 1h per week
9	<i>Philosophy</i> – 1h per week	-	<i>Religion (World Religions)</i> – 1h per week
8	<i>Philosophy</i> – 1h per week	-	<i>Religion (Sacred Texts)</i> – 1h per week
7	-	-	<i>Religion (Sacred Places and Saints)</i> – 1h per week
6	-	-	<i>Religion (Sacred Architecture)</i> – 1h per week
5	-	-	<i>Religion (History of Religion)</i> – 1h per week
4	-	-	<i>Religion (Benevolence)</i> – 1h per week
3	-	-	<i>Religion (Benevolence)</i> – 1h per week
2	-	-	<i>Religion (Benevolence)</i> – 1h per week
1	-	-	<i>Religion (Benevolence)</i> – 1h per week

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Website of the Philosophy Olympiad in Bulgaria:

philosophyolympiadbg.wordpress.com

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Nuran Direk



My IPO story

Introduction

As the founding members of the International Philosophy Olympiads (IPO), we felt sad because we realized that new participants knew nothing about our past. Human beings live in a time with three dimensions: past, present, and future. The present is a middle point between yesterday and tomorrow, connecting the past to the future. We wanted to write a note about the past. The idea belonged to Florina Otet, and we were happy to support it. She sent us orienting questions to respond to. In this text, I will tell my country's IPO story. "I hope our narratives will suffice to understand IPO's past and present and can serve as vehicles to carry IPO toward the future.

**1. What were you doing in 1993 (the year of your first IPO)?
What was your country like then?**

I shall begin by saying a few things about myself as one of the founding members because Turkey's joining IPO is a significant part of my personal life story. I would have to express myself within the political conditions of my country because I could achieve something only by coping with these conditions.

I was born in 1942 in Istanbul. At age three, I first remember strolling in a nearby primary school with a bag I had found at home. During my infancy, my family lived in the small town of Gelik in Zonguldak, a city in the Black Sea region with rich coal reserves. The house we lived in was part of lodgments built by the French during the invasion of the Ottoman Empire by the allied European forces. Gelik looked like a Western town. In the 1940s, the education system in this small town's schools was very good. Since I had already learned reading, writing, and simple calculations at home, I could register for the second year of school. In this town, there was no crime whatsoever. Even though I walked to school by shortcut through the forest, neither my parents nor I worried. My primary school had only five classes. The children coming from low-income families were given food in school. We used to go home for lunch. There were libraries in every class. Although the teachers did not force us to read, each student had a page in the library notebook, and the books they read would be noted there.

I completed 6th, 7th, and 8th grades at Mehmet Çelikel Highschool in the center of Zonguldak city. The system of education was rigorous, and the teaching staff was competent. I had to pay the price of attending school two years earlier by losing a year in the 7th grade.

I graduated from Istanbul Highschool for Girls in 1959 and majored in philosophy at Istanbul University, where I graduated in 1965. I worked as a philosophy teacher in recognized high schools in various cities in Turkey, such as Kırklareli Highschool, Antalya Highschool, and Adana Highschool. Finally, I was employed by Istanbul Galatasaray Highschool in 1980. This was one of the ancient schools established by an agreement between France and Turkey; France sent instructors for courses in French. Philosophy was among the courses taught in French, so only French professors could teach it. I gave sociology courses and worked there in the administration as vice dean until 1985. Since I was bored with administrative tasks, I retired, hoping to find a more creative work environment. Thus I took the opportunity to start working as a philosophy teacher at the private French Saint-Benoît

Highschool. My escape from administrative duties allowed me to participate in academic philosophy events.

My life in Istanbul was beneficent for me more than I thought. I had the chance to attend a meeting of the Philosophical Society of Turkey (TFK) centered in Ankara. This “Istanbul Philosophy Seminar” academic event was held annually in Istanbul. Computers and the internet did not exist then, so it wasn’t easy to know what was happening and what people were doing in the field. In these TFK meetings, a different theme was chosen every year, and the expert academics would give papers to open the subject with their arguments to questions and comments. Through these meetings, I met my teacher Prof. Dr. Ioanna Kuçuradi, a graduate from, and an assistant at, my department at Istanbul University in the late 1950s. I told her I would like to be notified of the TFK events. But of course, it wasn’t easy to be a full member of the TFK; it required some academic criteria. My teacher was kind enough to register me as an “external member” at the institution.

Thanks to that membership, I was consistently notified of the TFK events. Since I had the opportunity, I joined meetings outside Istanbul in places like Ankara and Ürgüp. As time passed, I felt the desire to join meetings abroad. I attended the World Congress of Philosophy. I benefited greatly from these congresses during my itinerary. I learned a lot and made great friends along the way. Among the congresses I attended, the most important, which has been a turning point for me, was the III Balkan Countries Philosophy Seminar, held in Greece between 5-8 June 1992. During this seminar, Alexander Stoychev¹ from Bulgaria presented the results of a study on “Philosophy for Children” made in his country

I listened to him with great interest. I must have shown my excitement for the topic so much that Ioanna Kuçuradi asked my opinion. After positive feedback from me, she asked: “wouldn’t it be nice if we do the same thing in Turkey?” I quickly replied, “Yes, it would be”. Without hesitating, she said, “do it then”. I answered in a confused manner: “Who? Me?” “Of course, I know you can”, she said. I was completely blown away by the fact that someone had that much trust in me. If someone like Ioanna Kuçuradi asks you to do something, you get it done; you cannot run away from it even if you think you cannot do it; at least you would try. Knowing what they ask you to do is so little compared to what they have done themselves in the past, you cannot refuse them. I thought that if my teacher believed in me, I should believe in myself too. I knew at that point that I should at least try my best. I went straight to Mr. Stoychev and asked questions about how I

¹ Program Director of Education and Research, Bulgarian-American Center

could get this done. He told me that I could join the Philosophy for Children event held under the direction of Ann Margaret Sharp in Varna in August. I accepted it with gratefulness. This invitation has been a turning point in my life. This was my first step into the field of Philosophy for Children. If my teacher had never pushed me into this ocean, I could have never been brave enough to jump alone. At first, I wasn't completely aware of what I was getting myself into. At times, I was the one pushing and forcing things; other times, I was the one being pushed and forced, but whenever that happened, I had unconditional support from my beloved teacher.

After I decided to go to Varna, on 16 August 1992, the founder and president of the TFK, Ioanna Kuçuradi, proposed to the Philosophical Society of Turkey the creation of a Philosophy for Children Section. This way, I began to take on a great responsibility.

The seminar in Varna aimed at educating teachers in the field of Philosophy for Children. They were mostly Bulgarian teachers. I was among the few “foreigners” at that seminar. The other foreigner was Florina Otet from Romania. Ann Margaret Sharp, the vice president of the IAPC², conducted the seminar. Some parts and exercises from Matthew Lipman’s books were studied during the seminar. In Varna, I did not only learn about the “Philosophy for Children”, but I also met two of my friends, not knowing that soon we would become the founding members of the International Philosophy Olympiads.



At the Philosophy for Children Seminar in Varna

² *Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children.* The IAPC is the oldest organization devoted to young people's philosophical practice.

I received a certificate of attendance from the seminar in Varna. I presented a report to the Philosophical Society of Turkey (TFK). My report contained an introduction to Philosophy for Children, explaining what it was, and I also sent it over to the 'Events and Ideas' section of *Cumhuriyet* Newspaper. The report was published on the 1st of November 1992 and received much attention. I was surprised by the public attention it received. I had created an expectation, and I was aware that I had to live up to it; I had to do something and show it to the people with these expectations. I started translating Prof. Lipman's book, the *Pixie*, and asked a couple of colleagues and friends for help with the teacher's version of the book. I thought things would end when the translation was done, but I soon faced problems due to linguistic and cultural differences. After finishing the translation, I asked two of my students³ for help. These students were interested in theater. They transformed the didactic language of the text into a theatrical one. I edited some of the exercises myself. Ultimately, the text has become a Turkish adaptation of Prof. Lipman's book. This experience taught me how strong the connection between language, culture, and philosophy was.

Next, I aimed to practice my text, but why wasn't it so easy? It was very difficult to talk about Philosophy for Children in a country where the abolition of philosophy courses was brought up and discussed by the authorities from time to time. But I had my mind set on this, so I would get this done. I considered all my possibilities and relations to find a way to make this happen. I have this habit that I love, but it tends to be quite exhausting for me sometimes: I believe it is sufficient for me to put all my efforts and time into something and try my best. Even if I fail to bring it about, I would not be upset knowing I did what I could up to that point. This is a principle that I learned from Descartes. For me, the measure of success isn't the outcome but the effort I spend on the road I choose to walk. If I know I did what I could, I will be as happy as if I have succeeded because the rest is not in my hands. Therefore, it's never a matter of "why not" but a matter of "how to cope with" for me. This way, it is much easier to catch opportunities. I was lucky.

I knew the head of the Istanbul Social Services Directorate, Figen Umur, from Galatasaray Highschool, so I went to her. We had a long conversation that day. I told her about my studies and offered to work in one orphanage for the kids connected to the Istanbul Social Services General Directorate.

³ From Saint-Benoît Highschool: Tuvana Gülcan and Yıldırım Karakiya.

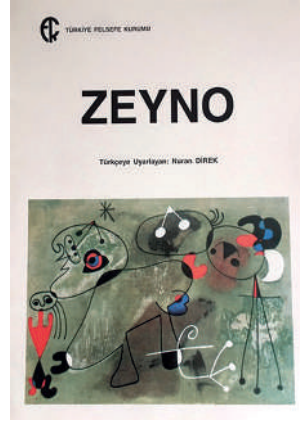
She supported the project, so I submitted a proposal to her to conduct a Philosophy for Children course at the orphanage institutes. I started working with kids from 4th grade to 5th in two orphanages when approval from the Social Services General Directorate was received.⁴

I worked and had fun with the kids there for two years, two days a week for an hour and a half. With my experience working with the children there, I made some adjustments to my book, *Zeyno*. These workshops with children were instructive for me. Until that time, I thought that I was a good teacher. But I didn't reflect on what it meant. "Teacher" doesn't mean "the one who teaches"; it means the one who eases the pain of learning or facilitates the learning process. This took some time for me to understand then. After two months of conducting my courses at these institutions, positive feedback came from the schools the children attended. School directors started calling the orphanage directors about the change they had noticed in the kids, and they kept asking about how this had happened in two months. The media suddenly heard about these workshops, and even the *Cumhuriyet* Newspaper displayed what I had done for the orphanage on its first page. Some of the children's story writers started coming to my meetings with the children at the orphanages.

My two years in the SHÇEK orphanages produced great results but were only limited to my efforts. I kept wondering how this could be improved and spread. More instructors were required for it to expand, but I didn't know how and where to begin. Prof. Ioanna Kuçuradi found a solution to my problem, giving me much space to work. With the approval of Mr. Lipman, *Zeyno* could be adapted only for the orphanage workshops by the Philosophical Society of Turkey (TFK), and they made that happen.

The good impression these courses had on almost everyone also attracted the attention of Ankara's Social Services General Directorate. Ioanna Kuçuradi, as President of the Philosophical Society of Turkey, submitted a project to the European Union Fund. The project aimed to expand Philosophy for Children into the orphanages of cities such as Mersin, Antalya, Adana, and Urfa. A course on *Zeyno* was given to philosophy teachers at Ankara between the 1st and 12th of October 1997, and these teachers would soon head out to give lessons at the orphanages for two years.

⁴ Küçükyalı and Kasımpaşa Orphanages Institutes.



The conditions differed in every orphanage. We had great results with no difficulties from some of them, but some teachers in other orphanages struggled with the conditions in these institutions. After the fund was over, everything ended. I started thinking about what else I could do. As a solution, I decided to prepare a book.⁵ I knew that in this way, it would be easy to reach out to teachers interested in this field. I started doing some practice on the book *The Little Prince*. It was a perfect fit for this kind of work. I started working on books because, in this way, I could reach out to some Turkish language teachers. I taught and practiced with them about extrapolating the philosophical core from the texts and finding new methods of approaching subjects so that they could enable their students to understand the philosophical issue at the heart of every story. This approach was focused on provoking the student to use his/her thinking power to ask questions and arrive at conclusions.



⁵ *Küçük Prensi Üzerine Düşünmek* and *Filozof Çocuk, Bilgin Çocuk* and *Çocuklarla Felsefe, Gençlerle Felsefe* are books of this kind.

P4C continued its journey throughout the years to follow. Many Philosophy teachers were trained during this period. These teachers opened their courses and seminars. Some universities have P4C courses and Ph.D. programs in their philosophy departments. Many young philosophers are interested in this field and are publishing books now.

Every task or work requires someone capable and willing to do whatever is possible to achieve it and the support of someone with authority. Turkey's P4C experience has been like this. P4C has been a starting point of the greatest developments in the domain of philosophy; it has been a gate opener for the Philosophy Olympiads and Philosophy Clubs.

2. What was the main motivation for your participation in the IPO?

Another result of the seminar I attended in Varna was the establishment of the International Philosophy Olympiads (IPO). I first learned about the existence of the Philosophy Olympiads in Poland and Bulgaria. This was new to me.

In 1992, Ivan Kolev invited me, Florina Otet, and two students to the Philosophy Olympiad in March 1993. Naturally, we accepted it with pleasure. That was the beginning for all of us. An initiative that started with Bulgaria's invitation continued the following year with the participation of five founding members from different countries.⁶ The Olympiads had UNESCO's support, and with the proposal of Prof. Ioanna Kuçuradi, the International Federation of Philosophical Societies (FISP) institutionalized it under its Education Committee.

⁶ In 1995, with the participation of Prof. Dr. Gerd Gerhard from Germany and Prof. Dr. Wladyslaw Krajevski from Poland we, as five founding members, signed a document committing ourselves to organize the International Philosophy Olympiads in our own countries. The fourth IPO was held in Istanbul. Thus the Olympiads were taken outside of Bulgaria for the first time and were hosted by different countries ever since.

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LETTER OF INTENT

To whom it may concern

With this letter, those who have signed below hereby create the Committee for organizing international competitions / Olympiads / in philosophy.

The membership of this Committee is restricted to representatives of all countries involved in the organization of the Olympiads.

The Committee is run by Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Secretary. The Chairman is from the country has already organized an Olympiad. The Deputy Chairman is from the country which will organize the next Olympiad.

The International Olympiads are organized annually. The Committee of organization has the responsibility to help any other form of organization which may contribute for philosophy in school.

Stara Zagora, 19 May 1995
Bulgaria

Founding members:

ROMANIA OTET FLORINA

TURKEY NURAN DIREK

POLAND WLADYSLAW KRAJEWSKI

GERMANY Gerd Gerhardt

BULGARIA Alexander Andonov

This document has the institutional signature of Prof. Andonov, but Prof. Ivan Kolev has been the founding member as his representative. There is a difference between teaching philosophy and teaching students how to philosophize on a topic. In our national education institutions, philosophy courses were designed to give information about philosophers but did not focus on making students think. My strongest motivation at that point was to get a chance to design a different course with students from IPO, and soon I realized that I was making progress toward achieving my purpose. What we observed in Bulgaria opened new doors to philosophize in class. At the time, I worked in Saint-Benoît, a French high school; I knew what needed to be done but did not have the freedom to carry it out. The curricula imposed a text to read, and exams to take but did not allow me to practice my new method. IPO gave the students and me a goal and motivation to create a space in philosophy clubs to philosophize together outside of class hours.

I have a memory that expresses the importance of what we were doing in my eyes. I cannot forget the striking sentences I read in a student's essay who had participated in the Philosophy Olympiads of Turkey at our center at Harran University in Urfa. At the beginning of his essay, he wrote: "I am the son of a shepherd from Urfa; I have never had any philosophy teacher before. This exam made it possible for me to walk through the gates of a university and, for the first time, someone asked me what I thought about something. Excuse me for taking this exam without knowing much about philosophy. I would not miss the opportunity to take your time by explaining what I think".

Turkish Philosophy Olympiads were also an important undertaking for philosophy teachers. In our country, philosophy teachers had to go through a struggle for survival during conservative regimes. To support them, I publicized the information about our international activities and highlighted our modest degrees received in the international Olympiads that took place in Bulgaria. The publicity enabled me to expand the space and support for philosophy.

The International Philosophy Olympiads greatly helped us to become aware of what we needed in our philosophy education. At that period in high schools, our students had some knowledge about the problems and solutions the most recognized philosophers dealt with. We knew our students never learned to ground their theses by giving reasons and arguments. They did not explain why they think the way they do. The American Robert College Highschool students were the only ones getting effective results in philosophical essay writing. Their essays had better academic quality because they were acquainted with academic writing in philosophy and other disciplines that required "out of the box" thinking. To overcome the problem, I contacted my colleague Mr. M. Salim Şirin at Saint-Benoît Highschool and talked about how we can get students to write better essays. Some days of the week, after the last lesson, we would gather with students for discussion sessions on excerpts from philosophy texts. When two teachers had different viewpoints and arguments, students became more interested and engaged in the conversation. The high participation and the lively student interest encouraged us to institutionalize these after-class discussions in a "Philosophy Club". To overcome the institutional difficulties of making the philosophy club official in the Highschool, I realized that the most appropriate way could be to organize an international student seminar – with the support of Prof. Aneta Karageorgieva from Sofia University, whom I had already met at Varna. I invited her to participate in the seminar.

Meanwhile, I decided to include Italian Highschool students in the organization. Our seminar took place in 1995. The language of the seminar was French and English. It had as its theme “violence.” Students presented their papers, followed by a discussion with the audience.

Before the seminar, I wrote a letter to the Istanbul National Education Directorate⁷ explaining what we would do in the seminar. I stated that I wanted to establish a “Philosophy Club”, whose regulations I prepared. The directorate approved my document. Thus, Philosophy Olympiads gave birth to the Philosophy Clubs. Since we gave an example, other schools started establishing their philosophy clubs.

In 1996, with the National Ministry of Education (MEB) approval, The IV International Philosophy Olympiads took place at Saint-Benoît High School. This was our first contact with MEB. Subsequently, we asked MEB’s permission to announce the Olympiads nationwide. Soon, the announcement was made by the Ministry. We had almost fifty participants from the list of schools offering education in a foreign language. In the following years, the decision was made that the host country would participate in the Olympiads with only ten participants. In 1996 we had a gold and a bronze medal for the first time. The media largely covered this success. Since 1993, the year IPOs became international, the Olympiads were made for the first time in a country other than Bulgaria.



⁷ We were organizing reading and discussion sessions in our schools. Our goal was to work together with other schools. 1997 was the year that the Philosophy Olympiads became well-known, and Philosophy Clubs proliferated. As a result of this work and the efforts of the philosophy teachers, philosophy seminars have been organized. They were held every year. The emergence of the platform with the participation of philosophy clubs was made possible by the steady efforts of teachers. Among those teachers who worked hard, I should enumerate Istanbul Saint-Benoît Highschool philosophy teacher M. Salim Şirin and Izmir American Highschool teachers Duran Şimşek and Yılmaz Murat Bilican.

They were organized in 1997 in Poland, 1998 in Romania, 1999 in Hungary, and 2000 in Germany, and continue to be organized in different countries yearly. Since 1997 we have been organizing the Philosophy Olympiads of Turkey by the regulations of IPO, and we have consistently participated with only two students yearly. Turkey hosted an IPO in Antalya in 2007.



3. What were your most important expectations when you founded the IPO (or decided to participate in it)?

I did not have any great expectations at first. The inspiration leading to my sudden decision to join IPO came from my encounter with philosophy teachers from other countries and by realizing during our conversations that philosophy had a high value and was given sufficient space in their education system.

I had little knowledge of philosophy education in France, but I loved their commitment to philosophy and engagement with it. To have the same opportunity was almost a dream for us. What could I do with an education system that only gives philosophy courses for up to two hours a week? During my philosophy classes in Turkish in Saint-Benoît, I encountered students who would come up to me with their acquaintance of thinkers like Pascal, Descartes, and Montaigne. They were acquainted with these thinkers in their French language and literature classes. This was a huge advantage for a philosophy teacher.

My other reason for joining IPO was to increase the students' interest in philosophy. These students had to practice tests incessantly and attend additional courses outside the school to pass the national university entrance

exams. They did not have time to give to philosophy. As a high school teacher, I always think that teachers should open new doors for their students to let them out. They should take their students outside their school, their city, and, if possible, outside their own country because recognizing and understanding other cultures is a part of the journey to understand oneself. That experience enables one to see what one is and is not, compare cultures, and interpret and evaluate ideas and situations, which pave the way for objective evaluations. Even school trips are an occasion for students to observe a world that is not theirs. Even though I was born in Istanbul, I attended a concert and theater play for the first time thanks to my high school teacher, who took us to these artistic activities as a class. As a high school student, I encountered students from different schools in seminars and discussion panels. Students would only remember these activities after they graduate. IPO, too, allowed different students to meet each other, creating a passionate peer-learner relationship. I hoped these events and organizations could open new ways of looking at things in students, thus increasing their interest in philosophy and, ultimately, inspiring the instructors to transform the way philosophy is taught in philosophy courses.

As you can see, my expectations were quite modest. I was never planning on revolutionizing philosophy education in my country. I only wanted to be a better philosophy teacher to get my students like what I was doing, shed light on their paths, and present some ideas along the way. So far, these expectations of mine have been fulfilled. I worked on myself and my team with each passing year. Because of IPO, many students went in and out of our country, and some of them grew up to be successful academics. I had the opportunity to teach in many ordinary and recognized schools. Some of my students were admitted to international programs and became academically recognized scholars later in their academic careers. I am proud of them. Indeed, I have never had a student whom I regretted and was ashamed to be the teacher of. I am very happy to have had such a positive experience. The strangest thing is that I have played a part in things beyond my imagination and expectations. I could have never imagined participating in P4C, TFO, IPO, and the Highschool in Philosophy Clubs. I could have never imagined such great achievements. Things happen to us that we never planned in life.

When you work on something so much and start treating it like your child, through sacrifices and efforts, try to improve it, you make like-minded friends that work for the same goal. At the start, taking decision and responsibility turn into something you do out of love. For the TFO, volunteering teachers are like a family.



We have thirteen centers but almost thousands of volunteers. IPO started and moved on as a family. I hope it continues this way.

4. Which of these expectations were confirmed?

At least the two expectations I previously talked briefly about were fulfilled. Students met students from other countries who shared the same interest in philosophy. This encounter greatly impacted even those students who already had the chance to travel abroad with or without their families. Moreover, meeting thinkers and philosophers from other countries was a significant experience.



(Bulgaria, 1994)



(in Prof. Krajewski's house, 1997)

The class syllabuses and the methods by which the teachers from the TFO family conducted their courses have changed. Texts were being discussed. Teachers did more research and expanded their readings to help the students willing to participate in the Philosophy Olympiads. They got to know each other by exchanging ideas while working together to evaluate the papers in regional juries. They learned a lot from each other, which is priceless. It was learning in the shared practice of the profession. We made some progress, even though I would not claim there was an improvement on the national scale. Every year, IPO and TFO share images of medals

and certificates and publishes prized essays on their website. Philosophy has become visible. We created a way of being together that the teachers of the other branches could not bring about.

Things beyond my expectations have happened as well. Because of the Philosophy Olympiads, students from all over the country developed an interest in and love for philosophy. To succeed in the Olympiads, studies out-of-class had to be carried out. Following the example of Saint-Benoît, many schools created their philosophy clubs. Istanbul Philosophy Clubs Platform (ILFKP) was established. Many universities with philosophy departments supported this initiative. Teachers discussed and then agreed on a theme for the platform every year. They also determined subheadings under that title. Two teachers organized the work on the topic for that year, and once in two weeks, students from different high schools gathered and worked on books and texts with teachers that weren't from their school. Thus, my greatest dream came true. A teacher from a prominent school could work with a student from an ordinary school. Thanks to the Highschool Philosophy Clubs' Platform, groups of students chosen at random worked with teachers also chosen at random for months and made presentations on that theme at the end of the year. In 2002, academics and students from different cities in Turkey came together in a symposium entitled "Philosophy in Turkey."



In 2003, the XXI World Congress of Philosophy in Istanbul held a Philosophy for Children session. Florina Otet conducted the student seminar. Larissa Retyunskikh, M. Salim Şirin, and Nuran Direk presented their papers on P4C. All of this was made possible by all the lovely philosophy teachers who joined me on my way. Everybody worked voluntarily. This event connected the high school philosophy teachers with the students who were interested in and loved the field and the professional academics who, as invitees, contributed to the organizations of this event. Professionals, teachers, and students shared the same platform. Our success in the Olympiads was mostly due to our success in the Philosophy Clubs. Istanbul set the example, which inspired Izmir and Ankara. Groups from these cities established relations and collaborated with ILFKP. Everyone walked on their paths. Now philosophy is getting attention from the intellectual middle class. Technological progress made it easier to reach philosophy talks and conferences. As a result, face-to-face contact with students has become harder, and numbers are dropping slowly. Even if not at its old speed, the platform is still ongoing in Istanbul, which has approximately twenty million people.

During that period, the Ministry of National Education suddenly launched investigations into schools with philosophy clubs. Therefore, when the TFK recommended me as the head of the P4C Unit for a study conducted by the Ministry of National Education on revising regulations, I took that opportunity to persuade the bureaucracy to include philosophy clubs in the educational regulations. To achieve that, I had to shuttle from Istanbul to Ankara once a week for two months; the personal financial cost and the fatigue were considerable, but the final achievement gave me peace of mind, even if it did not lead to an expansion of the club activities.

Technological developments and difficult life conditions impoverished some good and beautiful things. The rust had started to eat over the iron, as we say in Turkish. During the pandemic, digital platforms were great for teachers to get together with their students. We carried out the Turkish Philosophy Olympiads on these online platforms. Philosophy is left to the care and efforts of passionate philosophy teachers. However, the public interest in philosophy is increasing every day.

5. What are your fondest memories of the IPO?

Many memories, of course, but I can tell you the first one that comes to mind. When we participated in IPO 1993 for the first time, I was working in a French school. I decided to notify some colleagues teaching in other

schools (that offered education in a foreign language) to pick two of their best students as candidates for the Olympiads. Then I invited these students to my school to write essays on a topic I gave them. The names were hidden in the essays. When I revealed the names in the fold on the two papers, I thought were the best; I realized that both students were from The American Robert College. I notified them about our road expenses; we were all supposed to cover them then. These students had no financial problems, but we took the bus to Sophia to save some money. After buying our tickets for twenty-dollar, we headed to Sofia by bus. Sadly, in those days, everyone had to pay a hundred-dollar tax to go abroad. We had to pay that from our pockets. Inevitably, a good deed is never without its punishments. Football players were not charged to pay that tax. I struggled with the bureaucracy for three years to make it possible for the Olympiad team not to pay this tax, but in the end, I couldn't succeed. This gives pain to me still to this day. The students had no financial problems; they could also pay their taxes. We had a wonderful trip there and back, and it was quite fun. On that bus, it was the most fun I have ever had on the road. Once we got to the Edirne frontier, we had to wait four or five hours until we could pass. There was supposed to be a taxi waiting for us in Sofia to take us to Smolyan, but since we had to wait in the frontier, we missed the taxi. This was back when there were no cell phones, so we were quite confused about what we would do. In the end, there was someone who waited for us. It was Ivan who had requested that we be delivered by taxi. We were still pretty upset about missing our exam at that point. As soon as we had the chance to catch up with our group, they took us to the sightseeing program. We visited Smolyan and attended a wonderful presentation at the planetarium. After dinner at 21.00, they took the students in for the exam. Since I was tired, I decided to go straight to the hotel room. The female student and I were supposed to stay in the same room, and the boys were in the room next door to us. Sadly, I did the mistake of locking my door. I fell asleep while sitting on the couch waiting for the students. The students left the exam at 01.00 and came to my room, but the door was locked, and they couldn't get in. So, they climbed over from the room's balcony next to mine. They told me later that they attempted to wake me up but couldn't since I was in a heavy sleep. They wrote on my room's windowpane in toothpaste, "don't worry about me, teacher, I'm right next door." I woke up in the middle of the night horrified, then headed to the next room to check on my students and saw that they were sleeping in their beds. It is hard for me to tell you how awful I felt. I took the sheets and pillows off my bed, lay them next to my students, and decided to sleep beside

them. That girl has become a valuable university professor, and the boy is now a successful businessman. We had so much fun laughing about our experience on the way back. Remembering this memory is just so touching and wonderful for me...

6. How do you see the future of IPO?

Eventually, after thirty years of hard work, everything changed from how we started it. The world is changing. I have always been in favor of keeping the community spirit alive. As I became elderly, I began to have trouble walking; as I faced these hardships during the Olympiads, I always received support from the IPO family. That's why turning this opportunity into an economical enterprise from which some people make money or envisioning it as a competition disturbs me greatly. I believe philosophy is one of the most important values for protecting democracy, human rights, and world peace. This is what it means for students as well as teachers. A philosophy Olympiad is nothing like a math or physics Olympiad. That's why it is a part of FISP and is supported by UNESCO.

In the "*Paris Declaration of Philosophy*" proclaimed after the meeting organized by UNESCO about the outcomes of the research carried out on "Philosophy and Democracy in the World," it is stated: ⁸

We, the participants in the International Study Days on "Philosophy and Democracy in the World" organized by UNESCO in Paris on 15 and 16 February 1995, Note that the problems with which philosophy deals are the universal problems of human life and existence; Believe that philosophical reflection can and should contribute to the understanding and conduct of human affairs; Consider that the practice of philosophy, which does not exclude any idea from free discussion and which endeavors to establish the exact definition of concepts used, to verify the validity of lines of reasoning and to scrutinize closely the arguments of others, enables each individual to learn to think independently; Emphasize that philosophy teaching encourages open-mindedness, civic responsibility, understanding and tolerance among individuals and groups; Reaffirm that philosophy education, by training independently-minded, thoughtful people, capable of resisting various forms of propaganda, prepares everyone to shoulder their responsibilities in regard to the great questions of the contemporary world, particularly in the field of

⁸ Cited by Ioanna Kuçuradi, Antalya Highschool Students Philosophy Symposium, Opening Speech, Antalya, Feb. 2002. <https://www.filosofieonderwijs.be/files/0-950000-Droit-Philosophy-and-democracy-in-the-world-Unesco-Paris-1995.pdf> pp.15-16

ethics; Confirm that the development of philosophical debate in education and in cultural life makes a major contribution to the training of citizens, by exercising their capacity for judgment, which is fundamental in any democracy.

Committing ourselves to do everything in our power in our institutions and in our respective countries to achieve these objectives, we, therefore, declare that: All individuals everywhere should be entitled to engage in the free pursuit of philosophy in all its forms and all places where it may be practiced; Philosophy teaching should be maintained or expanded where it exists, introduced where it does not yet exist, and designated explicitly as «philosophy»; Philosophy teaching should be provided by qualified teachers, specially trained for that purpose, and should not be subordinated to any overriding economic, technical, religious, political or ideological requirements; While remaining independent, philosophy teaching should wherever possible be effectively linked to academic or vocational training in all fields;

The distribution of books which are accessible both in language and in sales price to a wide readership, the production of radio and television programs, audio and video-cassettes, the use for educational purposes of all forms of audio-visual and informational technology, the creation of multiple opportunities for free discussion, and all types of initiative likely to provide the largest possible number of people with a grounding in philosophical issues and methods should be encouraged with a view to providing philosophy education for adults; Knowledge of philosophical insight in different cultures, comparison of what each has to offer, analyses of what brings them closer together and what separates them, should be pursued and supported by research and teaching institutions; Philosophy as the free pursuit of inquiry, cannot consider any truth to be final, and encourages respect for the convictions of the individual but should in no circumstances, at the risk of denying its own nature, accept doctrines which deny the liberty of others, affront human dignity and sow the seeds of barbarity

IPO family should always be in solidarity. I want to thank everyone who created, protected, cared for, and worked hard to put into practice the values that make IPO what it is today.

7. What advice would you like to give teachers who will take IPO forward?

It will be useful for the new participants of the Philosophy Olympiads to read the stories of the founding members. That's why we prepared this

book. The memories of an institution are important. Every country might have pursued a different path. Every experience can have a value of its own and be a source of inspiration. Certainly, the new participants will arrive at conclusions based on their experiences. First, we participated in the IPO with Bulgarian students in 1993-94-95, and we organized the International Olympiads in 1996 in Istanbul, just like in Bulgaria. Hungary was the first one to join the other founding countries. That year, the host country was rightfully limited to ten participants for the upcoming years.

Since 1997 we have been doing the TFO with the support of TFK and the approval of our ministry. The school-family unions pay for the students' tickets for IPO, and we have determined two candidates for the position of a second teacher. They join by taking turns, and their tickets are usually paid for by their schools. We were able to handle financial situations easily. We found the appropriate sponsors in 2007 in Antalya when we hosted the Olympiad.

It will be good if the new participants can work with IPO by getting the support of a philosophy institution in their countries. The organ making the decisions should be an institution you are a part of. We have never had any financial support from our government, nor did we ask for it. The decency, ethical stance, and reliability of establishments from which one gets financial support must be considered, and one should never accept any corrupted money.

As a principle, the president of the Olympiads of the hosting country should have the right to accept and refuse an application. Of course, in making this decision, some consultation is necessary. We must remember that decision-making can be the basis of jurisprudence for the future. As far as possible, decisions should be above daily concerns. Punishing a country's children because of a state's president's decision is unfair. That's why I was quite disturbed to learn about the decision to prevent Russian students from participating in the past IPO.

New participants must prepare a CV expressing their academic identities and an application form identifying the institution supporting them. IPO is not an event that a country can participate in only once. For this reason, all new participants must present a statement of intent. In evaluating the papers, the teachers that participate for the first time should be assisted by an experienced teacher. That's all I have to say for now. I want to thank again everyone who worked for IPO.

Florina Oțet

Romania



”My IPO”

(A subjective history, not a lesson. But, *sapere aude!*)

Motto:

”I am me and my circumstances.” – Ortega y Gasset

”What is incomprehensible is that the world can be understood.” – Albert Einstein

I.

I have graduated the History-Philosophy Faculty, Philosophy-History Department, of the University in Bucharest (Capital of Romania) in 1978. Back then, I was 23 years old. When I attended the admission exam, back in 1974, in Romania, there were only three Philosophy Faculties, each of which with a very limited number of admitted students (20, if I am not wrong). In Bucharest, the competition was 11.3 candidates per one admission place. I was admitted on the first trial (after two written exams, and one oral exam). I had colleagues who had tried two or three times before succeeding (it wasn't really bad, because in Medicine or Law, for example, you got in after an even greater number of attempts). They obviously were older than myself and I remember wandering if it was a good thing for me that I had made it to get admitted to

the university right after graduating high school, at 19 years of age, only with my knowledge and experience background acquired during high school. I had studied French for 8 years (starting 5th grade, the first secondary level grade) and English for 4 years (starting the 9th grade, the first high school grade). These were and still are the only foreign languages I know. (In a way that my parents considered” happily” at that time, for my generation, Russian language study was no longer mandatory. I remember that at my first meeting with Ivan Kolev, in 1992, he did not believe me when I said I didn't speak Russian. For him, who came from the same political system as I was, the former communist block, that was something unthinkable.) With the exception of the children's magazines "Roudou et Rikiki" and "Pif" (to which my parents subscribed me in the 5th grade, meaning 1966; the magazines came from France!), of the texts found in the French and English schoolbooks (all belonging of the classics of French and English literature – prose, poetry, dramaturgy), some books in French found in antique shops (Verlaine, La Fontaine, Baudelaire, Claudel, Rimbaud – poor Romanians were Francophiles at that time and sold their books for the money of a loaf of bread), and some articles from the Morning Star (an English newspaper subscribed to by a college fellow football enthusiast), I hadn't read anything in a foreign language. I had read translations (now, after the books' market liberalized and is invaded by newer and newer versions of the universal literature and philosophy classics, I may say that those translations were very good ones – that is, with respect for both the original language and Romanian language), and I had a solid general culture - Dante, Petrarca, Rabelais, Cervantes, Goethe, Shakespeare, Diderot, the classics of the German, Russian, French, Romanian novel, Proust, Canetti, Pavese, Capote, Yourcenar, Joyce, Kafka, Marquez, Carpentier, (etc.; that is, I had entered a world where one could not lie - see André Maurois, "The mind reading machine"), a lot of memorial literature, correspondence, etc. and everything that was published in the magazine "Secolul 20" ("20th Century"), a magazine of universal literature. Each issue was the size of a book and now, when I leaf through the various numbers (I have the complete collection 1961-2010), I almost can't believe what I'm reading: interviews, confessions, criticism, essays... of exceptional value, with an intellectual altitude hard to match today and with an exceptional use of the literary Romanian language, both in translations and the original texts; that is, I had made contact, without knowing it, also with hermeneutics. Analyzing the text, deciphering and interpreting the meaning and significance of a word in a certain context remained for me, all my life, an obsession and a *sine qua non* condition of understanding a message, of authentic learning I may say.

I have lived my college years in a somewhat confusing way. Even now, it seems to me those years were foggy. In 1977, when I was in my third year, meaning the year before the last, two events took place: an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.4 on the Richter scale, that devastated Bucharest and many other places in our country, and the closure/abolition of the philosophy faculties, more specifically, their transformation into departments of the history faculties (as an effect of the Security Service "uncovering" the intentions against the system that a movement called Transcendental Meditation had had, a movement numerous intellectuals were clinging to; I don't know if this was the real cause, but that was the rumor in the halls of the faculty, among the students). After the earthquake, the shops of Bucharest became full of goodies. (Why was that? I let the answers to you.) That's when I saw and ate champignons for the first time in my life (they were Chinese canned, not fresh) and I bought my first real French perfume, Chanel 5 – with the scholarship money! (The only foreign perfume I'd ever owned was a Polish perfume which I used to buy in the summer, at the Blak See seaside, on the beach, from Polish women tourists. It was called *Byc Moze/Bich Moje*.) After transforming the faculty into a section of a History Faculty, along the whole fourth year, we had intensive Universal and Romanian History classes – in addition to the classes initially foreseen. To me, that was some kind of benefaction, as I loved History (I still do to this day); to us, to all of the philosophy students, that was a kind of delight ("torturing" the History teachers with our philosophical questions) and an advantage: we graduated with double specialization: Philosophy and History.

What became increasingly clear to me as I matured and gained more professional experience, was that the college I studied at was very serious: 4 years of Philosophy History (ancient, medieval, modern, contemporary), Gnoseology, Epistemology, Logics (5 semesters!), Psychology, Sociology (plus one semester of Sociological research methods and techniques), Pedagogy (plus one semester of Philosophy Teaching Methods), Economics, Ethics, Aesthetics – meaning an initial multidisciplinary training, where philosophy would become a tool of understanding and interpreting the various forms/fields of manifestation of the human. It was up to me to choose what was there to be chosen from everything I had learned and to make a treasure of it through the way I have built the classroom learning situations, by the way I was teaching, by the way I performed as a teacher.

I became a teacher immediately after the university graduation. At that time (that is, before 1989, December, the moment of the collapse of

the communist regime in Romania), college graduates were assigned, that is, they were given jobs in various places in the country, where they were needed, and they were obliged to immediately start working. The "logic" was simple: the state, meaning the people, finances the university studies, that is you benefit of for free, but after graduation, you must give back what you received, namely, go and work for minimum three years there, where the people/financier need you. After three years, it is up to you what you will do, if you choose to stay there or find another job.

I loved being a teacher from the very beginning. I liked the school, both as a student and as a teacher. If I think of it, I went to school for 57 years. What a lack of imagination, you might say... Yes. School was my life. And I lived 41 years (out of which 37 in Brasov, my native city) for my students, to help them enjoy learning and understand that they are more than another brick in the wall – see Pink Floyd. I didn't always manage to achieve that, but I have always tried my best.

I think I was a free, non-conformist (meaning always questioning the rules and authority of any kind) and an active person. I liked to learn and to invent. I enjoyed sharing and contributing. I enjoyed more giving than receiving. Probably that is why I enjoyed being a teacher. And, for as long as I know myself, I have loved to dance.

II.

I am trying to describe/analyze/make intelligible the historical context of the 90's in Romania – from my perspective and my life experiences lived back then. Living a radical and violent change of a political regime in your country, going from the socialism to capitalism (a transformation unseen before in the history until that point), from the autocracy/totalitarianism to democracy, from the absolute regulation to the freedom – identified (at least in the beginning) with the absence of rules, or the clear, obvious possibility to avoid them without being punished, but also with the possibility to create better rules – that is something that not many of my contemporaries (potential readers) have had the chance to live. But I have experienced this "something". I, one of the IPO founders. And when you experience such essential changes of the world around you, you cannot help but acquire the consciousness of historicity and of the fact that you are a *socius* – that is, together with others, you make history. To me, that historical context mattered enormously, and I think that, without understanding it, it becomes

difficult (if not impossible) for any reader to understand what motivated me, what I hoped the IPO would be, what expectations did I set out for this journey and why I followed its road for 30 years.

I admit that it is difficult for me now to clearly reconstruct and fix in time the multitude of events and changes that took place in the first decade after the revolution, after the fall of the "Iron Curtain" (thank you, Mr. Churchill, for creating the term!), namely, the last decade of the 20th century. And to tell about them to people who lived, from my socio-historical position, beyond the Iron Curtain, but never felt it (as if "the curtain" existed only for us, those from the communist bloc), or to people who have never heard of it. But the hardest thing for me is to find a certain balance – which I wish for in my writing of this IPO history: the one between who I was then, when I lived those events, and who I am now, when I am telling the story of it. It's hard for me to abstract from what I feel now, and it seems to me that I know – something important to me (but I'm not absolutely sure that I know; maybe I just feel I know): I lived then a beautiful illusion, an illusion that enlivened thousands of teachers in Romania and in the former socialist countries. To me, the huge size of the hopes I held in my heart back then, equals the disappointment I experience now. Of course, we were wrong somewhere. Somewhere home. For example, according to a 2021 ranking, Slovenia, Finland and the Czech Republic are, in descending order, the countries with the lowest percentage of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU. Slovenia and the Czech Republic – two former socialist states. At the opposite pole, Romania (former socialist state), with the highest percentage. And the risk of social exclusion comes primarily from education, from the way you, as a teacher, deliver education in the classroom, lesson by lesson, with your students, no matter how poor you are or how poor they are. That is my belief.

Finally, I will try to find that desired balance. But if I don't find it, I won't regret it. It wouldn't be the first time in my life that I didn't find what I wanted...

December 1989 and January 1990 were months of great social unrest (not to say "revolution", or "civil war", or "coup d'état" – terms later used by Romanian and foreign political analysts in reference to those months). For us, the ordinary philosophy teachers, the first change was that the subjects we had taught until then (Economic Knowledge in the 9th grade, Social-Political Knowledge in the 10th grade, Economics in the 11th grade and Philosophy in the 12th grade) were removed from the

National Curriculum on the pretense that they were Marxist. Therefore, after the winter vacation, we went back to school, not to teach lessons, but to just be present there. Together with some colleagues, I went to Bucharest to support our cause in front of the new minister of education (a philosopher!). We made it. Philosophy teachers were to teach a new discipline: Modern structures of society organization. Immediately after returning home, I have established the first teachers' union in Braşov. It is still active to this day, but don't ask me what it does; I have not been a member for over 20 years.

The new subject matter was only for the 12th grade students and it was discretionary (not optional, discretionary), that is, the students attended only if and when they wanted to, we were not allowed to record absences and evaluate by marks. Basically, we had to be in the classroom (to get our salary/get paid), even if the classroom was empty. For me, that was a fantastic experience! In December 1989, I was a teacher at a technological high school in Braşov. In January 1990, the students of one of the best theoretical high schools in the city did no longer accept their philosophy teacher and so they have called me. Why me? Braşov is a relatively small city with only a few good theoretical high schools (3-4). The news that there is a teacher who does Applied Economics projects with the students in the factories of Braşov (Braşov was a powerful industrial center at that time) with which the students win prizes at the national sessions of scientific communication for students, the news that there is a teacher who, in March 1989, nine months before the revolution (!), at the scientific communication session of the teachers presented a communication with the title "A team-teaching project" (even now I don't understand how that communication of mine was accepted back then... I am reading and re-reading the Bulletin of that session, which I obviously kept, and I still can't believe it: among the dozens of titles like The conception of comrade Nicolae Ceauşescu – the General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party and the President of Romania at that time – about the integration of the Physics knowledge in ...; ...about the role of biology in forming the conception about the world and life of the young people; about the role of the history in...; about the role of national literature in... etc. etc., my paper, with a short title, using an English term in English!!!) spread easily. And, yes, I knew what team-teaching meant (I had found out in college, at the course of Philosophy teaching methodology), and my project/lesson plan was quite good – a lesson about empiricism (F. Bacon, Locke, Hume) and rationalism (Descartes) held together with a history teacher and a mathematics teacher. I still get excited when I read it

– for the didactic rigor, the challenging spirit, the interdisciplinary openness exercise in which it engages the student.

Coming back. The Modern structures of society organization lessons were my first free teaching experience. I do not recall if the ministry has published the Syllabus or not, but I remember that I have told the students since the beginning that we will discuss about democracy, justice, freedom, truth (something really incendiary back then) and that it didn't matter for how long we would discuss each topic or if we would discuss them all; that was up to them, exclusively up to their choice. Extraordinary! Up to them, not up to me or the ministry of education! I was free! I remember working so hard to prepare each lesson. The didactic structure of a learning situation remained the same (as I had learned it in college – from teachers who became real gurus of educational sciences after 1990), I knew it. My attitude was the same – honest, normal, sitting next to students sometimes, rather than on the teacher's desk. But the contents, their interpretation, the sources, even the language, the type of reporting to authority (the authority of ideas/conceptions, I mean), the very idea of authority! Oh, my God! I felt an enormous moral commitment. And a tremendous joy. And a great happiness because the classrooms were full.

In 1991, together with my husband, who was a mathematics teacher, I have setup a trade company (meaning a private entity, something we didn't know until 1990 that was actually possible; this kind of thing existed for us only in the memories of our grandparents) and opened a book shop. We wished for a book shop! Books! Before December 1989, that is, during the old regime, there had been some serious publishing houses that had managed to translate, to "fool" (totally or partially) the censorship and publish valuable works/authors from the world we called free at the time. (But we didn't call it that out loud because, if we did, it would show that we were listening to Radio Free Europe, which was considered subversive.) However, the print runs of those books were extremely low. So that the saleswomen in bookstores (along with the saleswomen in the grocery stores – we had a monthly ration of oil, sugar, flour, eggs, and meat twice a year, on National Day and on New Year's Eve –, the saleswomen in gas stations – we had a ration: a maximum of 40 liters of gas per month –, and the doctors) were the most valued persons: you had to be liked by them and try hard for that, so that they keep for you under the counter the book you wished for which you wouldn't have got otherwise. (And yet, the booksellers didn't live in villas, but the grocery and gas station managers and doctors – yes... In other words, *Primum vivere deinde philosophari*, isn't it?)

We were both happy, and I assure you, we read more than we sold. That is, 0 entrepreneurial spirit, and for that reason, after a few years, the bookstore went bankrupt. We were still teachers, we were going to school every day. We had hired a saleslady, who would also do the primary bookkeeping. Month after month, every inventory was missing books that weren't listed as sold. The bottom line? People who entered the bookstore, the overwhelming majority of them teachers and students, stole books; and we almost didn't feel sorry for that. I remember making statistics of the most stolen books: History, Memorials, Philosophy, Political sciences, dictionaries – Top 5. We used to cover the loss out of our teacher salaries. The hunger/thirst for reading was huge and nothing seemed more important to us than the people to read. When you steal a book, to read it and because you don't have any money to buy it, when you steal a loaf of bread, to eat it and because you don't have any money to buy it, you are absolved of sin. Until when, unfortunately, we were no longer able to do that.

That's how I was living, and that's how I was towards the end of 1991 (I had just passed the dissertation to obtain the first teaching degree, the highest teaching degree in pre-university education, and I had obtained the maximum mark), when I received a letter, a letter on paper, which I found in the mailbox (back then we didn't have a computer, internet, mobile phone): a lady unknown to me, president of an association (The International Association of Philosophy Teachers – AIPPh in French) unknown to me (even the idea of association was unknown to me; association, not union), was inviting me to attend something that was about to take place in Austria (if I recall correctly; I am not sure). I was shocked. It was the first time in my life that I received a letter from abroad (I was 36 years old), it was written in English and was letting me know I had/ I would have the chance to visit a western country. Even now I don't know where that lady got my address, I don't even remember if I answered her or not. Anyway, I didn't go to Austria (there was no way, I couldn't miss school!). But I have clearly understood then that something was happening, something had started to happen: the world we had called free was opening up to us, and we had earned the right to call it so out loud. In order to start a direct dialogue with it, we had to speak English and to have ideas, passport, visa and money. (The first and last conditions still remain valid today. Which I think is good because a real dialogue means being able to give and being able to receive at the same time.)

In January 1992, my husband and I got our passports. It was a scary event up to some extent. My mother, who had never seen a passport in her life and had never been to another country, asked me in fear: "And where do you think of going? Don't you have enough work at home?!" (In a way, that

was true. I mean, there was then, and still is, a lot to do at home, in Romania. But that I understood later on.) I will never forget my father's voice: "Athena (that was my mother's name), you did your job. Now let them do their's!" In 1991, the Law on the convertibility of the Leu (our national currency; translated in English, Lion) had been adopted. (In Europe, as far as I know, only we and the Bulgarians have the national currency called lion. And no lion has ever lived in the mountains, hills, plains of Romania or Bulgaria. What beautiful history lessons could be made starting from the name of the national coins of the various states, from their coats of arms, and from the texts of their national anthems! And how much economic science, social psychology and philosophy would be needed for their conception by the history teacher, in such a way that the students would understand the world in which they now live!) We had acquired the legal right to buy currency, that is, US dollars, German marks, French francs – these were currencies I knew little about, but had never seen. Until December 1989, if you were in possession of foreign currency and were caught, you would go to jail because you had no way to justify having it (you didn't have a passport, or if you did, you had never been to a country other than those under the communist system). Right after we got our passports, we bought \$100 each – that was the maximum amount you could legally buy in a year (the purchase was recorded by the bank clerk, in pen, on the last page of the passport; I still have that first passport and I look at it as at a historical document - which it actually is). Obviously, my mother asked me annoyed and confused: "And what are you going to do with it, my dear girl?!" (At that moment, my father was watching with maximum attention a football match on our black-and-white TV. It was the time of Platini, Zico, Rummenigge, Matthäus, Vialli, van Basten, Zoff, Maradona and it was the first time he saw them on TV – because, until 1989, we had only one provider of TV broadcasts and it did not broadcast matches from international competitions in which Romanian teams did not participate. So, dad wasn't paying attention to the discussion; moreover, he didn't tell me that he would like to have a color TV... 😊) I had no idea. Anyway, we were not going to go to Turkey, buy jeans, cigarettes, second-hand color TVs to bring to Romania, sell them and, with the money obtained, buy dollars (on the name of who knows which retired nostalgic neighbor from the same block of flats, who had also got a passport) to go to Turkey again to buy jeans, cigarettes, etc. etc., as thousands of Romanians did in those first years of freedom. Romania was filled with stalls! A few of the stallholders of those years became millionaires, but only after entering politics and after having financed election campaigns.

At the end of spring, a former college colleague who was a teacher in Bucharest, called me. She told me that in August in Varna (Bulgaria) there was going to be an international workshop for the initiation of philosophy teachers in an educational program called Philosophy for Children, which she knew and was already involved in, and she asked me if I would like to be a part of it. Instantly, my answer was Yes! My subconscious: I have a passport, I have money (\$200: a whole pile of money!), it will be during the school holidays, Bulgaria is a stick's throw from Romania and I don't need a visa. Philosophy for Children? WOW!!! Is that even possible?! Here we go! Let's do it! And I left for Varna – by car (Dacia 1300 – google it, if you want to see it), together with my husband and Alexandra, our daughter, who was 5 years old at the time. It was our first outing abroad. Now, as I write, Alexandra's eldest daughter is 5 years old and has already traveled to 5 countries. To understand this and not to consider it an individual occurrence, you need to know/understand local and global history.

Don't even ask how many sandwiches mom made us, and with what sacrifices, so that we would have something to eat on the road! (In Romania, in 1992, the inflation rate was 210.4%. By the way: what level do we have now? 18%? Oooh, that's perfume!!! – meaning almost nothing, a kind of light breeze of inflation.) At that time, the distance from Braşov to Varna (approximately 500 Km.), on the roads of that time, was covered in 9-10 hours. With the estimated waiting time in the two customs, which we knew nothing about, plus the natural stops, we calculated that we would need at least 12 hours to reach Varna. So, we left Braşov at 4 in the morning. My husband had also put a 10-liter canister of gasoline in the trunk of the car (we didn't know how much gasoline would have costed in Bulgaria and we were thinking that stocking up would be a good idea). It was confiscated when we left the country, but the customs officers told us that they would give it back when we would return to Romania, obviously, on the condition that we returned through the same customs. And so it was. The first unforgettable memory of that "travel" (which, for me, is the T_0 moment of IPO) was Alexandra's reaction when, close to the border, she saw for the first time in her life armed soldiers holding the guns in resting position to their chests: she threw up instantly! Why did she throw up? Obviously not right then, we wondered. Perhaps, without realizing it, my husband and I had said something that she understood we were scared. Yes. The truth is we were scared. But we were adults. We didn't throw up; she threw up for us too.

And we arrived in Varna to the university campus, late in the evening, much later than we had estimated, passing through villages that were

strikingly similar to the villages in the southern part of Romania (the only difference was that the names of the localities were written in Cyrillic letters). But, yes! We were abroad! In a foreign country! ...

In those days (I don't remember how many – stories/memories have a different way of measuring the time) several things happened that were essential for me as a teacher and for how the idea of the IPO was born.

In order of the exposure, not of the importance.

The first one.

I met philosophy teachers from other countries (USA, Turkey, Spain, Bulgaria). First impression: we were all very alike, modest, somehow good, but not obedient, all born to be dedicated, that is, born for the teaching profession, and aware that you cannot make others learn unless you love learning yourself and you are continuously learning. But we were not simply teachers, we were philosophy teachers, people imbued with the idea that any teaching approach, any lesson, regardless of whether it is mathematics or physics or history or literature (etc.), induces a conception about the human being, about the world, about knowledge, that is to say, a philosophy. Of course, there was also a difference. The teachers coming from the "free world" countries were more relaxed, more serene, much more familiar with the use of the English in formal and informal contexts – which I felt as an ascendant of theirs upon me. (18 years after finishing high school, when I had learned English with a wonderful young woman teacher, coming from a family of old intellectuals of Brașov and who had introduced us with utmost exigency into the grammar and pronunciation rules of literary English, Oxford English, I had for the first time the opportunity to speak English. I had ideas, I had knowledge of Philosophy, Learning Psychology and Didactics, I wanted to say and contribute to discussions, but when I started to speak, it was as if someone was covering my mouth with a hand, I was unable to express in English what I was thinking in Romanian. It was an extremely frustrating but also challenging experience. Immediately after returning home, I started taking intensive private English lessons.) We, those coming from the former communist camp (and it was the first time I understood what camp meant – any kind of camp), which had disappeared only two years before, we were more tense, more rigid, more scared, but we were also hungrier (metaphorically speaking), more eager to learn and take home what we've learned – to change the world! Yes. Don't laugh! In the early 1990's, we in the former socialist countries felt that we were called to change the world – our world, the one we had lived in until

then – and we were enthusiastic about that. It wasn't the West that had to change, but only us, the East – that's what I was thinking back then. As if the "Iron Curtain" had only one opaque side. I believe this is how the people in the West were thinking also. (Which was obviously wrong for both sides. When a new family is established, its members learn from each other and behave, to a certain extent, differently from how they behaved before. This is how a real family works. It is valid for individuals, for states, for the members of the IPO family.) But, if I reflect now, after the passing of decades and after so many changes that have taken place in the meantime (good and bad), the teachers of the West and the teachers of the East were then two different human types; basically, the difference between West and East was then not only a political, or economical, or ideological difference, but an anthropological one (see Pierre Manent). I don't know if there is such a difference now, and if not, is that for good or bad. (Same for if yes).

The second one.

From the very beginning, from the moment I discovered and understood what Philosophy for Children is and that it is not about how the child is learning (I knew that, Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky and others), but about how the teacher must/should be formed/trained, regardless of the subject matter she/he teaches – in order to cultivate in the student curiosity (wonder; yes, wonder!), the spirit of observation (oriented towards oneself, towards one's own thinking, towards others, towards communication and language, towards the world), the inquiring spirit (how much questions matter, the questions the student is asking you!), the reflexivity (the time to be silent and think about something and how you think about that something), the acceptance, as natural, and respect for diversity, the confidence in oneself and in others built through shared learning experiences –, I was convinced that this program must become a mandatory component of the initial training of any future teaching staff, not just of philosophy. Was I wrong? No. I am absolutely convinced that Matthew Lipman and all his true followers all over the world would agree with me. Sweet naivety! It wasn't meant to be. P4C, as well as many other educational programs coming to Romania in the first years after the revolution (Junior Achievement, Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking, the infinitude of programs for Civic education, Education for democracy, Education for human rights, Education for tolerance, Education for gender equality, Environmental education, Consumer education, Education for participation, Education for peace, etc. etc.) became a kind of a carrier launching platform for high school teachers who were wishing

to become university professors (most of those directly involved became – and that was it, and that was the end of the "revolutionary" effects of those programs), not a profession of faith practiced day by day at the grassroots level – i.e. in primary schools, secondary schools, high schools and in the teachers' room of those schools – as I had hoped.

P4C and its "grassroots" effects, as they say? After 33 years of education reforms, many reforms, and 29 ministers of education (not a few of whom became ministers from the position of rectors of the most prestigious universities in Romania), Romania now has the highest percentage of functional illiterates in the EU states; but it ranks 6th in the list of countries with the fastest fixed internet in the world. Don't feel like being cynical and find it hard to refrain?!

Obviously, now, when I write, I suspect myself that, after the passing of the years, I have become sour like a mother-in-law (in Romanian, sour and mother-in-law rhyme!), while, when I was living the things I'm talking about, I felt like I had angel wings. An exaggeration in bouth cases, you might say. Is it really so? And who could, I mean who would know and have the right, to tell me?

The third.

I met Nuran Direk, philosophy teacher at a high school in Istanbul. One of the books written by Stefan Zweig is called "The Astral Hours of Mankind" – I already read it in 1992 and I hope you have read it too. *Mutatis mutandis*, in such an "hour" I felt when I met Nuran. I think what shocked me when I first talked with her was the ease and naturalness with which we communicated, beyond words. Back then, I knew almost nothing about Turkey (as I believe she did not know very much about Romania either). I had only learned that Turkey is the country where jeans were cheap and that many Romanians went shopping there. My more serious knowledge, so to speak, was related to the history of the Ottoman Empire and stopped at the time of 1812-1813 – the Russian-Turkish wars, the Peace of Bucharest, by which the defeated Ottomans ceded Bessarabia, Romanian territory, to Russia (what irony! This is why I love History 😊) – and 1923 (Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey – Türkiye, as we have to call it now). As a child, I had read a story: "The Story of Little Muck" (written by Wilhelm Hauff, German writer), in an excellent translation and with some wonderful illustrations; believe me or not, I was 37 years old and I still dreamed of getting to a bazaar in Istanbul to buy a pair of Turkish slippers like Little Muck had. Nuran was

and is an extraordinary woman, a force. A balanced person, with an incredible ability to find the right measure between justice and equitableness, between intransigency and flexibility, between the general vision and the different particular perspectives; a warm person, opened, friendly, generous, with an excellent sense of humor and who – how else? –, loves to dance. Above all, however, she is a person who loves her country with a lucid passion and who believed and believes strongly in the power of philosophical education to make people better and freer.

The fourth.

I met Ivan Kolev, a professor of philosophy, obviously, in a country that had been part of the communist bloc just like Romania. He had already accomplished something remarkable: four years earlier (that is, in 1988, a year before the fall of communism in Bulgaria!), he had initiated the first national philosophy Olympiad. It took passion and lots and lots of diplomacy to pull off something like that. That's how I thought about Ivan then, that's how I think now, 30 years later. And I feel I must add something also significant about him. According to a long-standing custom, the hosts of an IPO include in its program a half-day dedicated to visiting monuments/places they consider to be representative of... Well, Ivan almost never participates in these trips. Most of the time, he prefers to tour the city's bookstores and got lost (that is, stayed until closing time) in the reading room of a public library, voraciously reading the books he couldn't find at home. Looking at him, it often seemed to me that he was happy and unhappy at the same time.

The fifth.

It was the last evening of the seminar and on a campus terrace we all gathered for a beer. Some of the Bulgarian teachers brought along their family (it was vacation), as I did. Alexandra (I repeat, she was 5 years old) approached a Bulgarian boy and started talking to him, I don't know what, in Romanian. She was talking, but the little boy was not reacting at all. After a while, she gave up and came to me asking: Mom! Is that little boy deaf? Another strong lesson for me...

In the spring of 1993, I received a letter from Ivan. He was asking me if we, in Romania, had a national philosophy Olympiad and, regardless of the answer, if I was interested in taking part with two of my students at the final stage of the Bulgarian National Philosophy Olympiad (which was about to take place on..., in Smolyan, etc., technical details).

I will make a parenthesis that I find very necessary.

The tradition of national Olympiads for students is very old in Romania. For example, the first International Mathematical Olympiad (IMO) and, in fact, the first international Olympiad for students, was held in Romania, in Brașov, in 1959. At that time there was already a national mathematics Olympiad. (The second IMO also took place in Romania.) The first International Physics Olympiad was held in Poland in 1967, the first International Chemistry Olympiad was held in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and, in those years, Romania already had national Olympiads in these subject matters as well as in many others; according to the legislation of the time and the current one, the Ministry of Education annually organizes national Olympiads in all compulsory subjects included in the National Curriculum, both for middle school and high school. (Why the first six international student Olympiads were initiated and hosted by states that, at that time, belonged to the communist bloc is a question/subject for reflection. Why the former USSR, nor the current Russian Federation, did not initiate any international Olympiad is another question. We are philosophy teachers, that is, it is natural to ask ourselves questions, to try to understand the world in which we live.) I found nowhere official information about the first national philosophy Olympiad. The only certain thing I can say is that, in the spring of 1979, when I was in my first year of teaching, I was called to participate in the evaluation of the philosophy papers of the students participating in the county stage of the national philosophy Olympiad (the stage before the national one). From official information, I know that the first national computer science Olympiad in Romania took place in 1978. And the national philosophy Olympiad already existed quite a long time before that. But, as I have already reported, immediately after the revolution philosophy disappeared from the curricula and was reintroduced, if my memory serves me correctly, starting from the school year 1994-1995, with a new syllabus and a new textbook – which made it difficult preparing students for an Olympiad and conducting it. Its tradition was restored since 1996 and, in full knowledge of the matter I would say, with an extremely significant interest and participation of the students. Parenthesis closed.

Based on Ivan's letter (Ivan? Who was Ivan?! What times!...), my husband and I asked for a leave from school, I chose two good students from the twelfth grade, the humanities profile, majoring in social sciences, where I was teaching (the head of my school, teacher of Romanian language and literature as well as writer, was extremely proud that the "Andrei Șaguna" high school will have participants in a philosophy Olympiad from another country), we all got in the car and left for Bulgaria – on our own expense, obviously. I only asked the parents of the two students to give them some

pocket money. (In 1993, the inflation rate in Romania was 256 %.) The same thing happened in 1994, 1995 and 1996. But in 1995, an event happened that meant a lot to me and to the way I thought about the future of the IPO. In the evening of the day on which the competition had taken place, I was among the students: a spontaneously formed group of Turkish students, my students and Polish students. Obviously, they were discussing about the changes taking place in Europe – Turks and Romanians, more animated (more in the Balkan style?), the Poles, more distant and with a kind of an air of superiority. After a short time, it came to matters of the past – without the knowledge and understanding of which the problems of the present could not be understood and explained (everyone seemed to agree with this approach), that is, to history. This is where things got terribly complicated and even tense: they all spoke English, but it seemed like they were speaking different languages. They were all talking about the same times – Medieval and Modern – but with absolutely different references: the Romanians were proud of the crushing victories of our rulers over the various sultans of the Ottoman Empire, the Turks knew nothing about the Romanian rulers and the Romanian Lands, the Poles had vague knowledge of the Ottoman Empire, but remembered that Poland had once bordered Romania in the past; while some considered an event being significant and with consistent consequences on their past and present, that event was unknown to others or had marginal significance. And then, I asked myself, how to understand the other's present and build your present together with them?! The present from which to derive a common future, meaning one of coexistence?!... (I was then obsessed with a saying of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: To build the future means to build the present. I am obsessed with that to this day.)

By the way, not long after that, I ended up in the teacher's office of a high school in Istanbul and the first person I wanted to talk with was a history teacher. I told him about the fact that, in our high school textbooks, the "heroes" of 500 years of history (14th-19th centuries) are the leaders of the Romanian Lands – Wallachia and Moldavia – who won great victories in the battles fought against the Ottoman Empire, that the 110 years of the Phanariot era, in which the rulers of the Romanian Lands were appointed by the High Gate, left deep traces on the behaviors and collective mentality regarding the ways of access to power and public functions (power and public functions can be bought), that the direct influence of the Ottoman Empire on the Romanian people had ended only in 1877, following the War of Independence. And I asked him how he explained the fact that in the history textbooks that Turkish pupils study, no reference is made to the Romanian Lands. The answer was

clear and eloquent to me. The Ottoman sultans quickly subdued the Balkans. But their target was different: Budapest, Vienna... Unfortunately, to get there, they also passed through your lands, but you showed no particular interest for them. Phanariot era? We know about the rules by which the sultans appointed the rulers of the countries that paid them tribute. The Phanar is a neighborhood of Istanbul where mainly Greeks lived. Your War of Independence? Does not exist. There is only the Russian-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin. Another lesson for me...

Coming back. I understood back then, that very evening, that philosophy is the place (*locus*) and the language of authentic, decent and effective communication, that it is absolutely necessary for the IPO to continue to exist (and not only to exist, but also to become as attractive as possible to students from as many countries of the world as possible), but that IPO (as well as philosophy as a school subject) is not an end in itself. It is only a means (a tool), which itself had to be built at that time, for teachers all over the world to use it to deliver education in the true meaning of the word (not just instruction) and in order to achieve higher level goals: education for the respect of diversity in all its forms and active tolerance, for the affirmation of rights accompanied by the assumption of the obligations arising from them, for civic participation and responsibility, for peace in the end.

At that IPO edition, we have signed the Letter of Intent consecrating the transformation of the IPO into an institution, that is, sociologically speaking, into a stable social practice. A milestone.

On behalf of Bulgaria, Professor Alexander Andonov signed, as a "spear head" and as a representative of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University "St. Kliment Ohridski" from Sofia, the faculty that officially organized the national philosophy Olympiad of Bulgaria. The fact that our document had the university letterhead mattered a lot for the international recognition of the IPO, because Nuran, Gerd and I were there as ordinary high school teachers in our countries, accompanied by students from the high schools we taught at, and did not represent anybody – we were just people showing their free initiative, so valued in the early 90's and so free (if I may be allowed the pleonasm) in those years. But it must be reminded that, *de facto*, Ivan was the engine behind the scene of IPO (even though his name is not on the document) and, since 1996, he was permanently the leader of the Bulgarian delegation.

About Professor Wladislaw Krajewski, the signatory from Poland and who was then at his first participation in the IPO, I remember that he was

a university professor and headed the committee of the Polish Olympiad of Philosophy; a man whose life and professional experience far exceeded anything we had accumulated up to that point. When I met him, I already knew a lot about the anti-communist resistance in Poland and about the Trade Union called "Solidarity". The way Professor Krajewski understood from the very beginning what we dreamed one day would become the IPO, joining us unconditionally, was an example of solidarity (to an idea and to some people) that, unfortunately for me, I had not met too many times in my life.

About Gerd Gerhardt I feel the need to say a little more. He was German, he came from the former West Germany (that is something like the "Forbidden City" for us, the Romanians) and, when I first saw him, he looked more like a hippie than a teacher, which was a shock to me. I was born and raised in Braşov, a city where the German community had been a powerful civilizing factor for hundreds of years. To me, "German" meant seriousness, not frivolity, consistency, not appearance, rules, not uncontrolled deviation from them – that is exactly something different than Gerd seemed to be. Well, shortly I had realized that Gerd was, in fact, "the German" I was waiting for and the IPO needed. (Don't be so quick in suspecting me of prejudices! I have been their victim too often to practice them myself. I advise you to go through the results of studies run by Inglehart and Hofstede, for example, in order to accept the possibility that my statement does not originate in a prejudice.) For Gerd, the IPO was, is and will be (as long as it will continue to mean something to him – which obviously does not depend only on him) a space of fair play and intelligent freedom, that is, a place where all those who wish to locate themselves must do so knowingly, *recte*, by freely assuming and following its rules. There is no game without rules. If you don't like its rules, no one is forcing you to play the game. Those who enter the game, but do not follow its rules, are excluded, precisely so as not to spoil the game. That's what I think Gerd thinks. And I think he thinks well. Paraphrasing Kant, the person who accepts only the constraints arising from the freely consented law is a participant in the IPO.

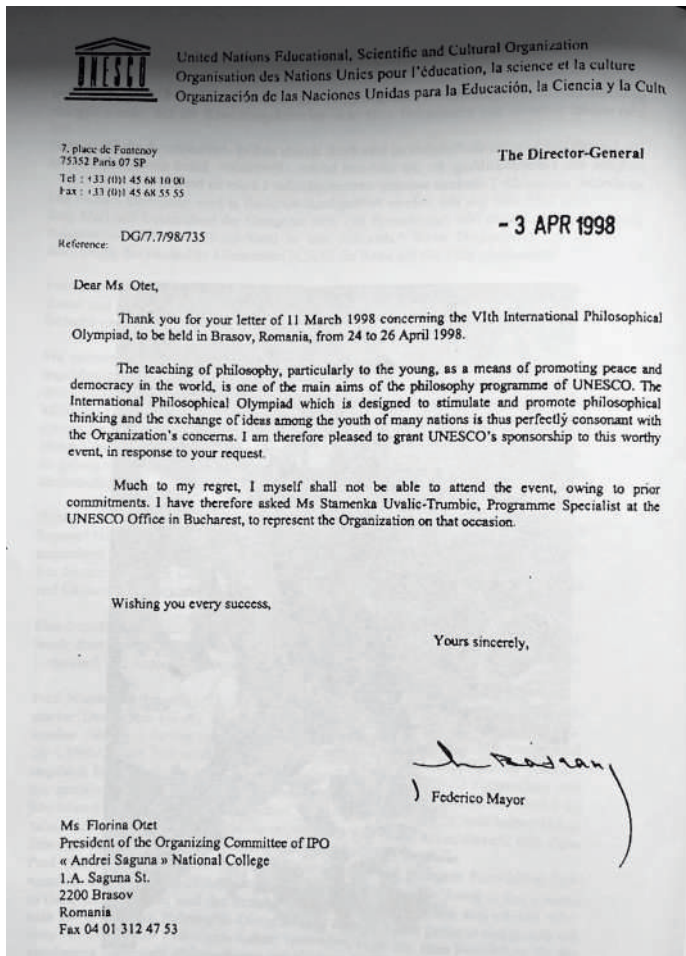
In 1996, on the occasion of the international Olympiad organized by Turkey, I met Ioanna Kuçuradi, who, at that time, was the General Secretary of the FISP. I have to admit that I didn't realize at first the major importance of her presence for the upcoming IPO (come to think of it, I don't think I even knew what FISP was back then; I found out afterwards). But what impressed me since the first moment was the feeling she created to me (and to all the participants – both students and teachers): that of meeting a person who deeply understands

the mission of any philosophy teacher and the role of philosophy in shaping the thinking, attitudes and behavior of any student. Ioanna Kuçuradi's role for the recognition of IPO by FISP was decisive, but not only for its recognition, but also for the active involvement of FISP representatives, highly prestigious university professors, in the next editions of IPO.

In 1997, I achieved something that now, in today's Romania and in the global context in which we are living (with so many major emergencies), would be almost impossible to achieve. Together with a former university colleague who was a general inspector of social sciences and humanities in the ministry of education and benefiting from the fact that the minister of education of that time was a university professor of philosophy (another one, not the same one who was back in 1990 – that one had only been a philosopher), I managed to determine the official recognition of the IPO by the ministry and its inclusion in the official list of Olympiads and international competitions in which, according to the Education Law, the participation of students and teachers would be financed by the ministry. From that point forward, only winners of the national philosophy Olympiad participated in each edition of the IPO (two out of the first three, selected according to the criterion of the ability to express themselves in one of the official languages of the IPO; the national Olympiad is held in Romanian), and they legally represented Romania, being the winners of an Olympiad organized at national level by the Ministry of Education. This was an important moment, not only from a symbolic point of view, but also from a practical/financial one: without it, it is very likely that the Romanian students would not have been able to participate in all the IPO editions that followed. And neither would have I. But paradoxically, Romanian students did not participate in the two online editions of the IPO, that is, exactly when the ministry wouldn't have had anything to spend in order to finance their participation. The reason: in the two years of the pandemic, no national Olympiad were organized in any subject matter, and the law clearly states that only the winners of the national Olympiads participate in the international Olympiads. I was deeply frustrated and outraged during those two years. (That helpless rage made me throw up more times than chemotherapy did!) But this also was a lesson: I understood that what had been a support, a facilitator, could just as easily become a brake, an inhibitor, if submission to law and state authority becomes uncritical, unconditional; if the IPO spirit is lost in the quicksand of temporal powers.

In 1998, I have organized the IPO in Romania, in Braşov. After almost 40 years (39 to be precise), Braşov hosted an international Olympiad again.

Where? At the school where I was a teacher, "Andrei Şaguna" National College, one of the oldest and most prestigious high school in Romania and whose motto is *Litteris et virtuti*. It was an event for the whole city. I wanted to show that Romania is not a "jiggaboo country" and that the Romanians „did not get down from the trees recently” – as I could already understand that some of the foreigners coming for the first time in Romania or that I had met in those years were thinking. I think I made it and I am proud of that. Probably, for many of my younger IPO colleagues, the fact that I am proud seems incomprehensible; if so, then to me it would be a further proof that unless you know a person's historical and cultural background, you cannot come to a genuine understanding of the underlying springs of her/his attitudes, behavior and aspirations.



Letter from UNESCO



Opening Ceremony at "Andrei Șaguna" High School

Also then, together with an Arts student, Igor Russo, – son of Vlad Russo, one of the most passionate Romanian lovers of the text and of its multiple possibilities of "translation" – I created the first IPO poster (see the Album). In a stylized form, it became the IPO logo (see the cover of the book). I wanted to suggest that the IPO seeks to be an "eye", a "look/view". Gerd put the dot on the i (as they say): IPO wants to be "the eye/view from the very heart of the fortress". And so it must be. Unfortunately, in the last editions of the IPO I have not seen this logo anymore and I do not understand why.

Ten years after (not 20, as in Alexandre Dumas), Romania organized an IPO for the second time. This time in Iași, a city considered the cultural capital of Romania, the host being the Faculty of Philosophy of the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University – the oldest modern Romanian university. Probably the participants in that IPO took home beautiful memories about the already renowned Romanian hospitality and about the beauties of Moldavia. If my memory serves me correctly, I think it was the IPO edition where the largest number of awards and honorable mentions were given, accompanied not only by diplomas, but also by expensive objects. The entire budget for the Olympiad had been drawn up by the general school inspector of Iași county and approved by the minister of education; they were both then in the middle of the electoral campaign and were running for positions in the Romanian Parliament from

the Iași electoral college. It was a huge deployment of forces: teachers, high school principals, students, private companies (owned by students' parents or teachers' spouses), the mayor of Iași, the rector of the university, the dean of the philosophy faculty... You are free to take this the wrong way: I thought it was such a big waste, so that, for expressing my disapproval, I went home the day before the award ceremony (see the Album).

Before the conclusions, I would like to add an observation; it is a finding and not an analysis.

IPO has a minor meaning for students and teachers in Romania (by the way, many philosophy teachers today, and therefore also students, do not even know that it exists); its impact on the status of the school subject Philosophy in the National Curriculum was and is minor. I make this statement with the following arguments:

- Philosophy was already a compulsory subject matter in the National Curriculum for theoretical high schools before the IPO (with the interruption I told you about) and its status remained the same (one year of study, with 1-2 lessons per week), even after the establishment of the IPO.
- The national Olympiad of philosophy already existed (with the interruption I told you about) and the IPO exerted no influence upon it: the number of students participating in the school stage, the city stage, the county stage and the national stage (as all national Olympiads are organized) is in a continuous and dramatic decline. According to the Olympiad regulations, only the winner of the county stage qualifies for the national stage and only if he/she obtained at least 90% of the total points awarded. (The county stage takes place on the same day and starts at the same time in all counties. The topic, the evaluation criteria and grading scale are the same for all participants and are developed by the National Commission of the Olympiad). Romania has 41 counties, plus the Municipality of Bucharest, which, given its school population, has the right to qualify three students to the national stage. Well, in the last ten years it was a rarity to have 44 participants at the national stage; and the quality of the essays that they elaborated in the finals, I don't even want to talk about... Although this is the reality, I think I am not wrong when I say that there has not been an IPO where Romanian students

did not obtain an award or, at least, one honorable mention; in other words, maybe, *non multa sed multum*. But the difference between IPO 2005, when the two Romanian students took Gold and Silver (and, at that time, only one gold and one silver medal was awarded), and the results obtained in recent years is huge.

- According to the law, the winner of a national Olympiad is admitted without competition to any faculty in Romania having the profile of the subject matter in which he/she won the Olympiad (with the exception of a few faculties that still have an entrance exam consisting of a knowledge and/or skills test – Medicine, Architecture, Arts, Law). Therefore, an award at the IPO means nothing to the younger who wants to continue studying in Romania. Yes, it can mean something for the young who intends to continue his/her studies abroad. Most of the students who received awards and honorable mentions at the IPO left Romania, but their decision to continue the studies abroad did not depend on the result obtained at the IPO; it was already taken before graduating from high school and their acceptance to a foreign university was already confirmed before the IPO. Recent statistics show that 80% of Romania's international Olympians continue their studies abroad. In fact, in a Top of migration carried out by the UN in 2016, Romania was in second place in the world (after Syria) and had the largest diaspora in the European Union. Obviously, it's good for them and it's bad for those left at home. They, perhaps, have a future; but we, without them, certainly don't. In a somehow analogous way, I remember the insistence with which Ji-Aeh, our colleague from Korea, pleaded for the idea of Alumni for a while. We have not been able to implement this idea, and we have never heard from Ivan, for example, that any former IPO participant had expressed to him the intention to contribute in any way to the enrichment of the IPO website, which Ivan is in charge with.
- Few of the Romanian participants in the IPO continued their studies in the field of philosophy; most opted for other fields of study, more or less related to philosophy. A teaching career in pre-university education, in order to competently stimulate students' interest in philosophy, is out of the question. (By the way, becoming a general school or high school teacher is one of the last options for a Romanian college graduate.)

- In Romania, according to the law, teachers of any subject matter, not just Philosophy, whose students obtain awards or honorable mentions at the Olympiads and International competitions recognized by the Ministry of Education (I think there are around 40) receive a score at the annual evaluation that, as a rule, ensures that they obtain merit gradation – that is, a 25% increase in salary for four years. This is indeed a very powerful motivation to train students – obviously, provided you find interested students and you are able to raise their interest level and prepare them for an Olympiad. As far as I'm concerned, except for the years when the national philosophy Olympiad was not held (in the early 90s), none of Romania's participants at the IPO was my student. Why? Because, according to the Regulations of the National Olympiad of Philosophy (which I participated in drafting), the members of the National Commission – which formulates the topics and evaluates the works at the final stage of the competition – are not allowed to be teachers whose students are qualified at the national stage. From 1997 until I retired (that is 22 years), I was part of the National Commission. I chose/preferred to share with my colleagues (teachers at various theoretical high schools in the country) the experience I was accumulating at the IPO, to help change the perspective from which the topics, evaluation criteria, grading scales were formulated (counting on the backwash effect of evaluation), to participate in determining the winners and selecting the two students who were to represent Romania at the IPO. This change of perspective (paradigm, after all) is, from my point of view, the most significant effect that the IPO exerted on the teaching of philosophy in Romania (only significant, but unfortunately not major).

III.

I participated in 29 of the 30 editions of the IPO (1993-2022). I was absent only at the Olympiad in Norway, for reasons related to my family life. In other words, 30 years of my entire professional life, in which I was only a high school teacher, included the IPO. And I admit, looking at things on the scale of my entire life, the IPO seems to be for me the most important achievement that I have contributed to. Although, please believe me, in my country there were not few the institutions that I created and the changes that I brought about in my field of professional activity.

Throughout IPO history, I have gone through many challenging experiences. They were all lessons for me, some – painful, some – joyful. Specifically, I don't recall them all, there were too many. The only thought that dominates me now is that I have learned something from everything.

I try to evoke some of them – experiences, not simply happenings, facts or particular situations. Again, the order is only of the exposure, not of the importance.

1. The fundamental purpose of the IPO, as thought by us, the founders, and stated in the IPO Statute, is to promote philosophical education at the high school level and to encourage the organization of competitions in the field of philosophy, for students, at the national, regional, local level.

What did we mean, then, by "promoting philosophical education"? (Oh, my God! During the communist regime, we used to say to each other, throughout the kitchens or other private places where we hoped no one would hear what we were talking about, that the language in which newspapers were written or spoken on the television was a "wooden language": a coherent language/text, but which actually say nothing. Not long after the fall of the "Iron Curtain", I discovered that this language is still used in programmatic documents but it is called "diplomatic language"...) What did we really have in mind? Obviously, a utopia: that we would succeed, we did not know exactly by what means, to determine the different authorities in different countries to make Philosophy a compulsory school subject matter and to organize competitions... (We did not dare to think about the philosophical education of teachers of various other subjects in high school education, we weren't completely cut off from reality.) And then, again, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: a goal without a plan is just a wish. (Some kind of a lesson plan? I think this analogy can be helpful.) Of course, we didn't succeed. Neither the UN, nor UNESCO, nor the OECD, etc. didn't succeed. (Just kidding, with almost dark humor: they didn't know how to "teach" this lesson in the last 30 years either.) But there are three examples (there are three I can think of now, but there are definitely more) that prove that the IPO has had effects at the grassroots, that is, where the effects that matter and last are produced, and which, to me, are uplifting, are doers of good. Nuran Direk and the first National Philosophy Olympiad that she organized in 1996, the year Turkey first hosted the IPO; plus the national network of Student Philosophy Clubs she created. Ji-Aeh Lee, professor at Ewha Institute of Philosophy in South Korea – which, since 2016, officially organizes the national philosophy Olympiad for students. (South Korea had already hosted an IPO in 2004, two years after its first participation in the Olympiad, and

had won a first gold medal in 2012. Search the Internet to learn about the level of tenacity, effort, and faith in the purpose of philosophical education that has proved and further proves Jiaeh.) Marcelo Lobosco and the National Olympiad of Philosophy of Argentina, of which he is the executive director, and the highly functional and fruitful link between the pre-university and the university environment he created.

I think these examples (to which others can obviously be added, and I invite you to ask yourself what those would be) might be a useful benchmark for understanding *la raison d'être* of IPOs – an understanding that, throughout time, I found with regret that not all participants (teachers) have.

2. The evaluation of the essays. It was always, meaning every year, a challenge. From the very beginning, we were aware (and not only we, the founders, but also the colleagues who have joined us over time on the IPO International Committee) that the evaluation would be a difficult issue. It is not for nothing that we still discuss today how we could improve it. On the one hand, because the essay in general, and the philosophical essay in particular, is a text that must reflect the creativity, depth and originality of the one who wrote it; and we wanted to encourage the analytical and critical spirit of the students, the personalized, original, creative reporting to the philosophical problem identified by the student in the chosen quote. On the other hand, because the assessors, the members of the International Jury, came/come from countries with different evaluation systems, bringing with them different principles, levels of professional experience and expectations. (Did we also have some kind of "adventurers" among us? Sometimes, rarely. But we did. In their case, we decided unanimously that "You can change the singer, but not the song" – Harry Belafonte; and that's what we did.) I remember, for example, a young teacher (definitely not an "adventurer") at his first participation in the IPO who told me that what he had to do, which was to grade essays, was new to him. In his country, students only studied the history of philosophy and their performance was judged by the richness and accuracy of the reproduction of knowledge. Logically, he was disappointed that the papers he had read were "very poor" – I kept in mind the expression he used – in explicit references to "great philosophers".

In addition, like any other competition, the IPO must conclude with a ranking and the designation of the winners. The evaluation is based on some criteria, but the ranking is based on the marks assigned by the evaluators. The correlation of each criterion with the description of at least three performance levels associated with it and with the number of points

awarded to each level is the generally accepted condition of the objectivity of the assessment. And I am sure that every student participating in the IPO believes that they have the right to have their work evaluated objectively. Over time, I was a group colleague at the first stage of the evaluation (we came to the idea that the first stage of the evaluation should be done in a group, and not individually, after years of finding that individual evaluation often led to the situation where an essay received, for example, grades 5, 8, 7, 4, 9) with teachers who considered that the correlation I talked about would be necessary and beneficial, and colleagues who considered it impossible or even stupid, an unacceptable constraint. (It would be interesting to analyze the socio-cultural areas from which the two categories of teachers came...) At home, in the national commission, it was easy to negotiate – because we all spoke the same "language", i.e., we were within the same assessment paradigm. At IPO, diversity, which we had decided to value and encourage, was sometimes a source of frustration. It happened to me more than once, in the second stage of evaluation, to read weaker/worse papers than those that, together with the group I was part of in the first stage, I had practically eliminated from the competition. In the absence of a unanimously shared grading scale, we might as well consider that we were wrong (those who had disqualified), or that they were wrong (those who had advanced the paper to the second stage of assessment) – both situations reflecting the absence of objectivity and, in fact, an injustice. But the experience that I felt not only as difficult, but also as painful, was to explain to a student why a paper that, according to the score obtained after the first two stages of the evaluation (performed by the members of the International Jury), was located, say, second in the overall ranking, reached the final ranking (as determined by the Steering Board members) in say, eighth place, or even lower.

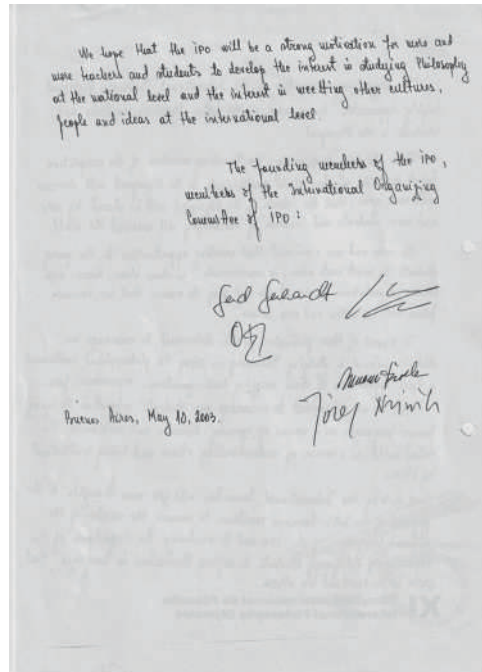
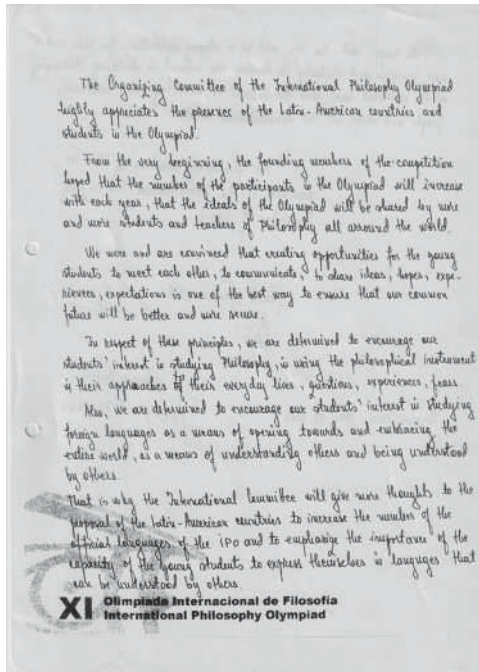
I remain strongly convinced that nothing, that is, no grading scale, no matter how cleverly designed, can replace a person's solid professional training (acquired in the classroom, actually working with students not just three or four years), open mind, and good faith. Then and only when these conditions are met, the intersubjectivity of the evaluation, i.e., the high number of marks a paper receives, ceases to be a reasonable compromise formula and becomes a guarantee of the good evaluation at the IPO. (Good - in relation to the IPO purposes, student expectations and assessment science.)

3. The language, respectively, the official languages of the IPO. As far as I know, IPO is the only international Olympiad where students do not

write papers in their native language. We all agreed that this provision of the regulation is intended to ensure equal opportunities for participants. But, beyond equality of opportunity, there was something else on my mind then. First of all, the fact that my students and I, who came from former socialist countries, had enormous difficulties in procuring philosophy books written in the author's original language (I remember that, during college, a professor had told us that Romania was then the only socialist country where Kant had been translated, not in full, of course, directly from the German language and not from the Russian version of the works...); in the new conditions, I was convinced that I had to stimulate with all my powers the students' interest in reading philosophy in French, German, English - the languages in which Western philosophy was expressed – and the teachers' interest in giving/indicating bibliographies to the students in these languages. Secondly, I still had vividly in my memory the painful feeling created in me by the statement of a great Romanian philosopher, a statement I had become aware of in my last year of college: you can't have access to philosophy if you don't know ancient Greek and German. I knew neither ancient Greek nor German... I hoped that at least some of my students would learn them (and, to my joy, I was not wrong).

This condition provided in the IPO Regulation also had restrictive effects. For example, French students only started participating in IPO a few years ago (and I think they are generally from Alsace), English students had a sporadic attendance at the IPO. However, for American students, the acceptance of Spanish as the fourth official language of the IPO was an advantage. But the restriction was relative. We all knew (and accepted) that Indian students, for example, came from English-taught high schools, as did Korean students, as did many European students studying in international high schools (see for instance, the schools where the winners of this year's BSPEE study). The matter naturally ceased to be problematic: the overwhelming majority of participants in the IPO write in English (and the fact that, for example, the results obtained in recent years by Romanian students at the IPO are no longer as good as those obtained in the past has not as essential cause the fact that they speak less well English than students from other countries or the fact that our national Olympiad continues to be held in Romanian). So clearly has the students' option for English become a majority option that, not long ago, some colleagues proposed that English remained the sole official language of the IPO. I was against it and I'm glad I wasn't the only one. Beyond the obvious reality (and precisely as a constructive reaction to it), linguistic diversity, as part of the cultural

heritage of humanity, must be preserved and the IPO must contribute to its preservation by encouraging students to learn as many foreign languages as possible.



Buenos Aires Declaration, 2003

4. The topics. In the beginning, it was easy to elaborate them, that is, to choose the quotes – we were all philosophy teachers, we taught philosophy at the high school (even if according to relatively different Curricula), we belonged to the same cultural space (Europe), that is, we had similar cultural and professional landmarks. The only care was that the quotes were located in different fields of philosophy (as these fields were delimited 30 years ago). But over time, as the IPO became global (and obviously we wanted that to happen), it became more difficult – we had to break free from Eurocentrism, keep the evaluation criteria as operational as possible and do the IPO as much as possible attractive for students from all over the world (that is, to encourage them to feel "at home" in the world of philosophy and IPO).

The issue of the topics at the IPO seems essential to me (along with the evaluation of the papers, obviously) and I find it wonderful that no other international Olympiad for students, of the 14 that exist, raises the

issue of developing the topics from a perspective as complex as the one from which we do. (Did you know, for example, that in no international Olympiad students are offered four topics, with the right to opt for any of them and the obligation to choose only one?). To make topics, i.e. to choose quotes that "cover" the diversity of backgrounds (not only of knowledge of philosophy) of students from all corners of the world participating in the IPO, to make sure that the topics give students the opportunity to prove both their knowledge of philosophy and, at the same time, the ability to interpret this knowledge from the perspective of their daily life experiences and the global problems of the world we live in today, is a huge challenge. (Ironically speaking, happy are the topic makers at IMO, IFO, ICO, IBO, etc.) So, I felt somehow relieved when the International Committee of the IPO, in the context of the increase in the number of participating countries, i.e., of the diversity, decided that the topics would be established by the FISP, based on proposals made by the IC members: FISP is impartial to the IPO, has a global vision, knows contemporary trends and priorities in philosophy (a kind of Aeropagus). But also, since then (don't ask me since when – I like history but I have not a memory of historian), since the topics/quotes have started to become somehow trendy and some of them have authors unknown to me (which, of course, is not the fault of those authors – 😊), I started to notice some interesting things. I will come down to three of them.

4.1. Increasing the weight (in total papers) of works that did not have any kind of philosophical references, or that had summary philosophical references and vaguely related to the theme/problem addressed in the essay, or that contained statements that seemed to refer to certain philosophers or philosophical conceptions, but it was unclear whether the student intended to make the referrals and made them knowingly, or it was just us, the assessors, who considered the student's statements to be referrals. All in all, the increase in the weight of works that no longer seemed like philosophy, but, rather, creative writing combined with a kind of critical and personal thinking. Somehow, the essays seem to be written by someone who feels free to write anything about anything; her/his only, let's say, "restriction" is to respect the "template", that is the standard school structure of an essays. But the IPO is a philosophy Olympiad, right/wrong? Is a philosophy essay in which no philosopher's name appears acceptable? Not even one? Of course! Originality! Creativity! But knowledge really doesn't matter anymore? Until where?

4.2. Increasing the difficulty of evaluating papers and ultimately naming the winners of an IPO. A sequence stuck in my mind, like from a

movie. (An astral moment? I do not know. Possibly.) I was in a group, in the first stage of evaluation. At one point, a colleague leaned on the back of his chair, raised his hands and exclaimed: Exceptional!!! I immediately asked him what paper it was about. 34 (I say now, I don't remember exactly and it doesn't matter). Some colleagues had already read it, others had not. I had assessed that paper to a 7, another colleague to a 9. A discussion followed, which I regretted not recording, a lesson in the wisdom of assessment. I was wrong and the colleague proved that to me. I have suspected myself many times over time that I am too "attached" to the Romanian evaluation system in which the obsession with correctness and objectivity makes the grading scales extremely analytical and the evaluator extremely constrained (to assess means to be a prisoner of the grading scale). Sometimes I was able to break free of this constraint, sometimes not.

4.3. Increasing the quality of essays from the top of the final ranking. I have kept papers from the early years of the IPO. The difference between then and now is impressive. Certainly, today's IPO participants are free people, brave, I would even say offensive, attentive to the world in which they live, with a well-directed critical spirit and an openly assumed personal touch in what they write, with a good knowledge of contemporary philosophy, even if they do not prove (to us) extensive and deep knowledge of the history of philosophy and of the lineage of philosophical ideas. The topics (almost all of them) pick up the ball in their net, as they say, which is wonderful. Paraphrasing the motto of one of the most intelligent humor newspapers in Romania (on the verge of extinction, obviously! – I mean both, the newspaper and the intelligent humor), our students are smarter than us.

Addendum

Of course, if I say IPO is a unique phenomenon, I am knocking at an open door. I guess we are all convinced of this truth. What the uniqueness consists in, why this might be a lesson, and for whom, meaning who would be desirable to learn it, that is another matter.

I am watching TV on various channels, I see what happens in Ukraine, at the World Football Championship, at the NATO Summit in Bucharest, in China, around the world – what a waste of money, or how much money made of a wrong source, or how many diverted lives! We all live in the year 2022, but we are not all contemporary with each other.

It seems to me that IPO is just a fiction (in the sense given by Hans Vaihinger, see *The Philosophy Of "As If"*), among the many fictions that seem to underlie the world we live in. But, unlike other fictions, it is not only useful, but also beautiful and morally beneficial.

There are five people who created this fiction: Nuran, Slavek, Gerd, Ivan, Florina. But it will continue to exist not because of them, but because of you. So, show must go on, my friends! (Thank you, Fredy Mercury!) You have to say, year after year, let's do it!

And maybe, years from now, when it will be your turn to write your own history of the IPO, you'll say to yourself: Good friends we have, good friends we have lost along the way. In this bright future you can't forget your past... (see Bob Marley)

Respectfully yours,
Florina Oțet

Gerd Gerhardt



My IPO History

My Beginnings

It was in 1993 when I noticed that there were famous essays in the philosophical tradition, but the essay form did not play a role in German schools. So I started thinking about what distinguishes an essay and how one could enrich teaching through essay writing. I wanted to try it out in my small but very motivated course; the students had chosen philosophy voluntarily.

Excursus: Why Essay?

The form of the essay unites different functions of language in a balanced way.

Insofar as it is devoted to a factual problem (which must be formulated as clearly as possible), the representational function is important; however, the representation dispenses all aspirations to

totality, not only out of the necessity of the required brevity, but also because it regards through the claim to understand a question comprehensively and exhaustively as an illusion. In general, the confidence in being able to conceive the world in a structure of thought is gone. (There are topics that have never been talked about with scientific systematics, e.g.: human weaknesses. These topics can almost only be dealt with essayistically.)

Since the essay is kept rather short and generally comprehensible, it is particularly well suited to publicly negotiate problems of general interest; thus the appeal function is also considered. The appeal demands at least this: Look at things differently than you are used to, look at them anew, look at them for once the way I look at them.

Because the essay – in contrast to a scientific essay, a treatise – presents the problem from an emphatically subjective perspective, its expressive function is important.

In writing, the essayist is stimulated by his own play with the different functions of language, which he can bring into a fruitful multi-sensuality and imbalance. In this way, he shows wit and inspires the reader.

"An Essay on Human Understanding" by John Locke does not fall under this understanding of the essay; the factual content clearly dominates here. In Locke, the term essay is a gesture of modesty and means what we generally understand by "essay", namely "attempt", and it does not mean a form of writing; the length of the work would also speak against this.

The essay also harbours its pitfalls: Self-expression must not dominate or even replace the presentation of objective facts and arguments. One should also beware of the spirit of arrogance and dogmatism.

IPO means for me, in reference to the essays, also Ideas – Passion – Originality.

By chance, I read the short report of a colleague who was in Bulgaria with pupils for the essay competition in 1994. I got in touch with her; she did not want to participate again. So I contacted the Bulgarian organisers and followed an invitation from Prof. Andonov to Bulgaria in May 1995 with the three best students of my philosophy course, without an address and without a programme. We imagined an adventure. And so it was.

Two days before the journey, the ministry informs us that they refuse any support. I am able to find sponsors for the three students one day before the travel, and I pay my travel costs privately, as in the following years.

Airport processing is very tedious. We do not know any program. To our surprise, we do not stay in Sofia, but are driven by car 300 km to Stara Zagora.



IPO Stara Zagora, 1995: The German Delegation

The most important event for the future: Prof. Andonov presents a paper to us heads of delegation on 19 May 1995 and asks us to sign it: „[...] those who have signed below hereby create the Committee for organizing international competitions / Olympiads in philosophy.“

I felt unexpectedly close, not only with the friendly hosts, but also with the other delegation leaders: with the energetically sparkling Florina Otet, with the sovereign and witty Nuran Direk (I did not know at the time how successfully she fought and still fights for philosophy in her country) and with the serene philosopher Vladislav Krajewski. Unforgettable how we read and evaluated an essay together and he laughingly said: I don't understand a word, but it's very good. – Only later did I learn that some students wrote down essays they had learned by heart.

My students were delighted to meet students from different countries who were discussing the same philosophical problems and authors as they were.

In this exciting atmosphere I didn't have to think about it for long, I signed the document, the far-reaching consequences of which we didn't suspect at the time. We all had no plan, no idea what could develop from our decision. Only the feeling that something good could come of it.

The five signatories formed the newly created International Committee. Ivan Kolev was appointed as permanent secretary of the IC.

Back in Germany, concerns came to my mind. Previously I had published academic papers, also written philosophical radio programmes and philosophy textbooks, and done intensive theatre work. I taught at the Gymnasium and trained teachers in German and philosophy. Not to mention my own five children, who also demanded attention. (And my body demanded to play football every week.) Actually, I was very busy and had no time for additional work.



Władysław Krajewski, Nuran Direk, Gerd Gerhardt in Stara Zagora 1995

On the other side, with my signature, I felt obliged to commit myself to this International Philosophy Olympiad.

So I published a call for a philosophical essay competition in Nordrhein-Westfalen. (Germany has 16 federal states, the largest being North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW). The 16 Länder are largely autonomous in the field of culture. NRW has the longest and broadest tradition of philosophy teaching in schools.) Two colleagues replied to me. My letter to the Minister of Education on 19 July 1995 asking her to support the organisation of an IPO in North Rhine-Westphalia was met with harsh rejection. At a meeting of 100 philosophy teachers, I presented my ideas for an essay competition. Only one colleague showed interest.

The Phase of Stabilisation (1996 bis 2001)

There is not the space here to present and pay tribute to the many years I went to IPO, and so in what follows I confine myself largely to the years up to 2001. The younger IPO participants did not experience them, but in them the spirit of IPO developed, the engine for so many years.

In February **1996**, Unesco declared the IPO worthy of support. Three months later, at Nuran Direk's invitation, we met for the IPO in Istanbul.

We were overwhelmed by the beauty of the city, the atmosphere and the landscape on the Bosphorus, where Europe and Asia meet. – For the first time, all participants had to write their essays in a foreign language.

In **1997**, the IPO took place in Poland. It was a new experience for me. The impressive tour of the city of Warsaw made me realise that my identity also included the worst years of German history; Warsaw had been occupied by German troops in 1939 and largely destroyed in 1944. Ashamed and amazed, I experienced the great hospitality. There were also other cities where thoughts of the dark German past were evoked, especially in 2012 in Oslo and 2016 in Ghent and Ypres, respectively.



Jewish cemetery in Warsaw, IPO 1997

Until 1997, essays were scored with a maximum of 100 points. (But how was one to justify the difference between 83 and 87 points?) I had made very good experiences with scoring up to 10 points in selection procedures for highly talented students, with the points being awarded in three levels (1-5; 6– 7; 8-10): We first used this scoring in 1998, and we have been using it in IPO ever since until now. It was only softened down a little when it was decided by a majority to also be able to award half points.

A major step forward was the first formulation of an IPO statute by Prof. Władysław Krajewski, expanded in 2005 by Jozef Niznik. Until then, we often discussed issues that had long been discussed and decided all over again.

In Brasov in **1998** I clearly saw a difference between German bureaucrats and Romanian generosity. The headmaster of a German school in Brasov followed rules so readily that he followed rules that did not even

exist. The Romanian headmaster, on the other hand, was distinguished by a charming grandeur.

Florina Otet had prepared a very nice round trip via the Dracula castle Bran to the summer castle of the Romanian kings, so we could also discover more about the country. "The organisation was really perfect," an enthusiastic participant wrote to me.



IPO Budapest 1999. Michal Koss, Ivan Kolev, Florina Otet, a colleague from Ukraine, Wladyslaw Krajewski, Nuran Direk, Gerd Gerhardt

1999 was an important year for me. I decided to organise the IPO in 2000. I knew it was a big gamble because I had met with almost universal disinterest from colleagues and rejection from the government. The attitude behind this rejection was: we don't want to promote exceptionally gifted students, we prefer to promote "in the broad". This was a mistake in thinking, because it does not promote either the stronger or the weaker pupils.

After all, in Mr. Peter Ost I found a leading representative in the school authorities who supported me, and four philosophy deans also warmed to the idea of an essay competition.

How would I select the ten German students who were allowed to take part in the IPO? I published a call for an essay competition for students who had philosophy classes in the state of "North Rhine– Westphalia". 420 students submitted an essay, which was a very encouraging start..

In **2000** I was able to organise the **IPO in Münster/Westphalia** with main responsibility. I had about five helpers, including Silvie Rücker, who had accompanied me to the IPO in **Budapest in 1999** and caught fire; unfortunately, she died already in 2002. All 29 essay writers as well as their accompanying persons from 11 countries were accommodated in the Akademie Franz-Hitze-Haus, with which I have always cooperated successfully since 1999 until today. The cooperation with the University of Münster also worked out well. For the first time, we extended the IPO by one day (3-7 May).

From today's perspective, it seems strange to me that we followed the tradition of presenting money to the competition winners of the IPO.

The organisation of the IPO cost about 22,000 DM, i.e. about 11,000 € (including a printed documentation with a number of 300 copies). I had written to many institutions to win them as sponsors. Disillusioned, I had to realise that only those sponsors could be acquired with whom there were personal relationships. At the last minute, a representative of the Ministry of Education came and brought his contribution: 500 DM (250 €). Unesco had promised me in a letter 4000 DM; the money never arrived.

After many preparatory considerations, an important decision was made in Münster: "The International Philosophy Olympiads will be organised from now on under the auspices of FISP".

There was also a very important turning point in the consciousness of German education politicians in 2000: the "Pisa shock". The OECD's Pisa study (Programme for International Student Assessment) rated the knowledge and skills of 15-year-old German pupils as below average compared to 32 industrialised countries. The essay competition, which had previously been rejected, was suddenly for the ministry an excellent promotion of pupils.



Essaywriting IPO 2000 in Münster

In **2001**, I reorganised the selection of the German competition: I have invited the 26 best essay writers to a four-day "**Winterakademie**" in Münster every year since then. On the day after arrival, the essays are written (in English or French). On the third day, usually in cooperation with the University of Münster, there is a lecture and workshops as well as a meeting of about 20 philosophy teachers who evaluate the anonymised essays (in groups). On the fourth day, after a lecture, the ceremony with the awarding of prizes takes place. The top two will then travel to the IPO. The five best-placed students go on to a selection process at the Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes, the most prestigious scholarship. For the teachers and students and for me, these four days were always highlights of the year. I was inspired to start these Winter Academies by the very good Summer Academies I experienced as a student at the aforementioned Studienstiftung.

In September of each year, I invited the former participants of the Winter Academies to a philosophical weekend, again with lectures and workshops on a pre-arranged topic. These meetings have never failed. They were always inspiring. Literature, art and music also played a role in embedding philosophical reflection in a broader understanding of Bildung.

For the first Winter Academy in 2001, a representative of the Ministry of Education came and announced a U-turn in school policy: "We had to re-learn." I was now officially put in charge of the competition (which, however, did not take place all over Germany until 2006); for the first time I was given a very small budget by the ministry. The essay spread as a form of writing in schools and curricula. Since 2008, pupils who do not have philosophy classes have also been allowed to participate.



Władysław Krajewski at the closing ceremony, IPO 2000, Münster

On the Development of our Statutes

There doesn't exist a golden age of the IPO. It is a history of problems and problem-solving, of adjusting our statute, according to the expansion of the number of participating countries, a history of successes and of frauds and vanity fairs. And financial problems.

We defended more or less successfully **three guide lines**:

- 1) IPO is a movement for students, not for travelling teachers or professors or politicians or any VIPs.

- 2) IPO should not be conducted by persons who are not dedicated to the main purposes of the IPO, by persons who have their own interests or persons who will be replaced after one participation.
- 3) IPO is a grassroots movement. Antihierarchical. It is not a source of getting honours or titles.

1995: Olympiads have been welcomed by **UNESCO** (see "Conclusions of the International Study Days Philosophy and Democracy in the World", 15-16 February 1995)

1996: 1. Statutes for the IPO 1997, sent by Wladislaw Krajewski for the IPO in Poland. Still evaluation with 100 points.

1998: In Brasov for the first time: max. 10 points in the evaluation of essays.

2000: Cooperation between FISP and IPO: "The International Philosophy Olympiads will be organized from now on under the auspices of FISP."

In September **2006** in Istanbul we, the founding-members together with FISP representatives (Prof. Kucuradi and Prof. McBride) and Prof. Son (president of the IPO 2004) met in Istanbul and wrote **new regulations**.

By the new regulations we intended

- 1) to give up the dominant role and responsibility of the founding members in favour of a broader **democratisation** the IPO-organization combined with **responsibility** for the development of the IPO: All delegation leaders of the countries that had organised an IPO were from now on to have equal rights.
- 2) to give the highest authority to those who are in direct contact with the students (familiar with their abilities and with their needs) and who are experienced in organizing an IPO: the International Committee.
- 3) to **strengthen the approved cooperation with FISP and the contact with Unesco**, together with a practical way of problem-solving during the IPO: the Steering Committee.

2019: 27 June: new Statutes, now with **Ethics Committee**.

2022: New Statutes, now with **Executive Board**.

The IPO has now a long life. If the IPO were in a bad state today, it would need a revolution or it would die off. The condition of the IPO is very good. You hear it, among other things, in the opening speeches at every IPO. In the many years of its existence, it has never dropped out. Dedicated and responsible people have always been found to keep it alive. Great thanks are due to them. It is very worthwhile to continue working on it, also by reforming the statutes where necessary.

Because it is easy to destroy something, it is hard to create something sustainable.

Disappointments

In the many years that the essay competition has been held, there have been – amazingly enough – only two Olympiads that were poorly organised. (One of them, and uniquely, led to an uprising of the students who had travelled there; the FISF did not recognise this IPO either).

Worse were intriguing attempts to copy the competition or to eliminate the previous organisers. This happened twice on the international level and twice I experienced it in Germany. (There was even an attempt to get the IOC in Lausanne to ban us from using the term "Olympiad").

All this caused a lot of unpleasant work and cost a lot of energy over the years until these attempts, which were never about the students' interests, failed. If one were to see it sportingly, one could say: the essay competition was so attractive that it was worth great effort even for the intriguers.

The 16 German states are, as I said, autonomous in the field of educational policy; there is loose cooperation in the so-called Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK). A proposal to the KMK to include the essay competition in the list of recommended federal competitions in order to make it even more widespread and to make it easier to attract sponsors is at the suggestion of Prof. Dr. Michael Quante (at that time President of the German Society for Philosophy) signed by the representatives of these institutions:

- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Philosophie
- Gesellschaft für Analytische Philosophie
- Forum für Didaktik der Philosophie und Ethik
- Fachverband Ethik – Bundesverband e. V.
- Fachverband Philosophie e. V.

The request is examined for 20 months and then rejected in 2012. The professional quality is explicitly confirmed, but it is criticised that "nationwide participation" is not guaranteed and the financial basis is not secured. I receive the helpful advice: "This could possibly be remedied by attracting sponsors."

In 2018, I handed over my official position as head of the German Essay Competition to a younger colleague because I thought this would secure the long-term future of the competition. In the meantime, the government has appointed the second successor. In order not to undermine the continuity of the previous work, I continue to work for the IPO (and have been paying all my expenses privately again since 2018, as in the early years).

The most severe disappointments at the IPO were manipulations in the evaluation of essays and violations of moral principles in dealing with students. Philosophers do not necessarily act according to the principles they teach, they are not better people. The manipulations have been remedied by having a representative of the FISP select the essay topics and by anonymising all essays before they are graded. To prevent moral violations, we have set up an ethics committee.

Encouragements

I have been present at all IPOs since 1995. All of them were only possible because many people put their energy and ideas into them.

All the Olympiads are unforgettable, even if I could only mention a few from the early years.

The IPO allows everyone to experience the extent to which the peoples of the participating countries are united by a common culture of philosophical argumentation, even if in some countries it is difficult for philosophers to maintain their position alongside other cultural influences.

We should focus on the individual student, not the country they come from.

Unforgettable to me is seeing a Hungarian student reading in the hotel lobby at IPO 1999 in Budapest. I asked him what he was reading. His answer: Hölderlin. I was very surprised: That's very difficult! The student's answer: Yes, but it is the most beautiful writing in the German language.

I have received a lot of feedback from students and colleagues, which shows what made the events such a success. This makes all the work worthwhile. I am only reproducing a few excerpts from the many emails, most of which refer to the Winter Academies, but for the IPO the comments would be similar.

Some examples from the many feedbacks from colleagues:

"I was thrilled by some of the students' work, surprised by the comfortable accommodation in the Franz Hitze Haus and very impressed by the two lectures. That's why I definitely want to be there again next year!"

"The many suggestions I received will certainly stay with me for a long time."

"I guess we are all still so "verdenkt" that everyday life is still hard :)"

"[...] I would be happy to serve as a juror again, because I find this work stimulating and fruitful for my teaching and my personal engagement with important problem areas in philosophy."



Meeting of former Winteracademy students (Münster, 2007)

Some examples from the many feedbacks from students:

"Of course, this one weekend, enriched to the top with names, numbers, a historical context here and a 2500-year-old fundamental insight there, was a treasure mine for a possible expansion of the individual level of knowledge, which, coupled with openness, even passion and varying cultural events, might just be predestined for an increase in the level of education. [...] It is a part, a small piece on the way of the journey to oneself."

"[...] the Winter Academy really made me a different person, not in the one week of course, but in the aftermath."

"[...] the Winter Academy has meanwhile grown into a little (imaginary?) island somewhere in my soul and not infrequently I allow myself a little holiday and escapism there."

"[...] I really enjoyed the academy and the talks and discussions gave me a lot of new ideas, they also showed me what school could ideally look like (it's not so easy to adapt to normal everyday school life again afterwards)."

"The opportunity to attend an event of such great format [the IPO in Warsaw] must definitely continue, as I can't think of a better way to promote international understanding."

"[...] which is also true for me and many other participants of the Winter Academies or IPO: what a life-changing experience that was for him, to find out that you are not alone, that there are other people out there who tick like you do."

One can see: Good organisation and good accommodation are not decisive, and the competition itself should not be the focus. The essential thing is rather the spirit of openness, friendliness and curiosity with which people meet. Everyone involved can contribute to this. Without this spirit, I would not have done the work over so many years with so much excitement and satisfaction.

Sebastian Köthe, former IPO participant, made an 80-minute professional **documentary film** with his team about the Winter Academy and the IPO 2013: "apropos: philosophie" (cinema premiere: Rostock, 2016). You can rent or buy the film online here: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/92150>.

Concluding

There would be much more to say about all the IPOs, especially the personal encounters with colleagues, friends and students.

If I would sum up the spirit of the IPO – according to the “objectives” mentioned in our statute – I would say: It is an organisation for the contact between individual students from all over the world who are dedicated to philosophical thinking as their contribution to the culture of peace and development of humanity.

Perhaps we may even say: we experience ourselves as global citizens at the IPO.

Józef Niznik

Poland



IPO Story

For years I was involved in the institutional and personal support of specially gifted children. One such institution is the Philosophy Olympiad. In Poland there is no regular teaching of philosophy in schools although there are exceptions: philosophy classes are offered in some private schools, along with those run in foreign languages. Thus, hundreds of the Polish high school students who participate in the yearly philosophical competition usually demonstrate their own interest in the subject.

The National Philosophy Olympiad started in 1988, and since 1990 the Polish Philosophical Association has been its supervising organization. For many years, the chairman of the National Committee of the Philosophy Olympiad was professor Władysław Krajewski. Among Polish philosophy professors, he was a leading specialist in the philosophy of science, teaching at the University of Warsaw for most of his academic life. Although he started his philosophical journey as a Marxist, in the 80s he declared that his masters

were Bertrand Russell and Karl Popper. Krajewski was known for his friendly, tolerant attitude toward each new generation of philosophers. His unpaid work in the Committee of the Philosophy Olympiad demonstrated his devotion to the competitions for high school students and his conviction that the Olympiad was an effective way to improve the quality of intellectual life in Poland. In the early 90s, I agreed to be the vice chairman of this body. From then and until 2022 the office of the National Committee of the Philosophy Olympiad was located in the building that housed my own institute, the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

Professor Ivan Kolev initiated the international Philosophy Olympiad in 1993 as a modest philosophical competition gathering participants from three countries: Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey. Within two years, those three countries were joined by representatives from Germany and Poland. In 1995 the representatives of these five countries decided to organize the International Philosophy Olympiad as a yearly, regular, international competition for high school students. It was at this point that professor Władysław Krajewski invited me to join the enterprise.

In 1997 and 2005, we held the IPO in Warsaw. These were the Vth and the XIIIth Olympiads. Below are a few photos from the XIIIth Olympiad.



Beginning of the Closing Ceremony. Photo: Michał Rożynek



Closing Ceremony. The pictures on view were prizes to be selected by the laureates. The person fifth from the left is prof. Władysław Krajewski. Photo: M. Rożynek



2005 IPO Laureates with Józef Niżnik, Michał Rożynek, and Joanna Kusiak. Photo: Michał Rożynek



One of the tables at the final dinner. In the green jacket is Florina Otet.
Photo: Michał Rożynek.

I was responsible for organizing the 2005 Olympiad in Warsaw. This was possible thanks to the very effective help of Michał Rożynek, a teaching assistant at the University of Warsaw, who later joined me at the several IPOs in various countries as part of the Polish teams. In 2010 I decided that a younger generation of philosophy teachers should shoulder these international philosophical encounters. Therefore, in 2010 Magdalena Gawin from the University of Warsaw and Michał Koss from one of the best high schools in Gdynia began leading the Polish teams. Both had valuable experience in teaching philosophy.

I believe it was very fortunate that the rapid development of this initiative came at the time when democracy returned to Central and Eastern Europe. Also, it is significant that philosophy enjoyed a rising interest among Polish high school students at the time of systemic economic and political transformation. Radical changes were then underway in the everyday life of all Polish citizens, with high unemployment and overall hardship punctuating our departure from communism.

Lying behind my involvement in the Philosophy Olympiad was curiosity, above all. I wanted to see whether philosophy can offer an intellectual,

transnational background for the young generation. Also, how are the great masters of philosophy, their questions and doctrines, understood in different countries? Since one of my academic specializations was the sociology of knowledge, I wanted to see how the reception of philosophical ideas differs in differing milieux – as well as how important philosophy is in other educational systems. It was deeply satisfying to see that despite the neglect of philosophy in the Polish educational system, the results of our representatives in the IPOs were good and sometimes outstanding. For example, in Seoul's 2004 IPO, the Polish participants achieved the highest two results.

I believe I contributed to some of the improvements made over the years in the IPO regulations. Probably the most critical technical change was moving from handwriting to computer word processing. This happened around 2000, but I am not sure when exactly. From the pictures I have, I see that computers were in use in Seoul in 2004. This change was crucial for several reasons. First of all, it facilitated the work of international juries that had more and more work because, with time, the number of participating countries was increasing. I remember that at the first IPOs, the reading of handwritten essays was sometimes a challenging task. Second, receiving printed texts for evaluation helped to convince the participants that the process was entirely anonymous. In fact, since the very beginning, the issue of anonymity in the evaluation procedures was at the center of attention of all the teachers on the IPO's international jury. Over the years, those procedures were continuously improved, and I believe all teachers involved should still work to make the results of each IPO more and more just. This is probably the most difficult part of the IPO because, with the number of participants, the international jury is also growing. Some new jury members simply do not have enough experience for this task. In the beginning, when there were few participating countries, the essays proposed for the highest prices were read by all the jury members, and the discussions among them settled which essays were the best. However, later that became impossible.

For a few years, I tried to make the International Philosophy Olympiad a regular UNESCO event hoping that this would also secure some financing. Representing Poland at the UNESCO General Assembly (it was probably in 1999), I devoted most of my speech to this issue. The auditorium responded well, but the idea was left without any decision from UNESCO's leaders that would place the IPO in UNESCO's official calendar, as I proposed. Similar efforts to draw FISP into the IPO clearly brought better results.

From my perspective, participation in several IPOs gave me a highly valuable experience. Primarily due to the opportunity to meet exceptional people among the teachers. Indeed, after I asked my colleagues to replace me in the IPO, I began to miss many of the teachers, some of whom are still part of this exceptional international philosophy community. Another rich experience was visiting many countries. Some of them I would probably never have traveled to, if not for the IPO. However, although the hosting countries always made a great effort to show some of their most interesting sites, the amount of work on the evaluation and the very limited time usually did not allow much "touristic" fun. I believe this should be corrected in the future by extending the IPO time-period and including more attractions in the regular program.

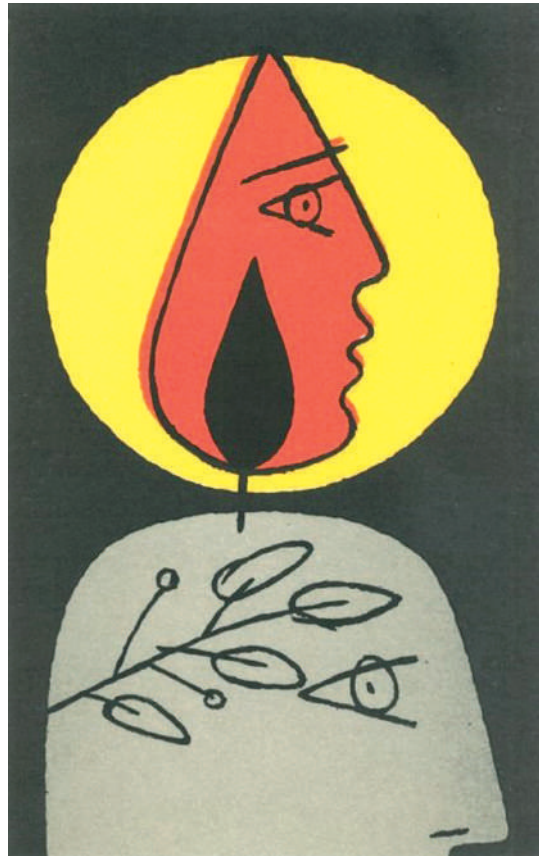
From what I see now, the future of the IPO looks very promising. The number of participating countries is constantly increasing. We should continue to work on the institutionalization of this event in the aim of securing continuous international funding, thereby making the event at least partially independent from the host country's budget. UNESCO was probably not a good choice. My current suggestion is to draw the attention of the European Commission and try to put IPO in the official calendar of the EU. After all, most of the philosophy at the core of the IPO competition is a European heritage.

I would also suggest a formalization of the IPO's organization. So far, it has managed to work informally, but the current size of this enterprise demands change. In other words, the IPO should become an international organization registered in one of the participating countries. I know that such an idea was discussed by the IPO international jury and rejected. I believe that for further discussion of this issue, IPO needs the professional opinion of a specialist clarifying the legal and organizational issues.

PART II.

IPO-events since 1993

IPO 1993, Bulgaria, Smolyan



The logo of the first national philosophy Olympiads in Bulgaria (1989-1995) and the first 3 international Olympiads (1993-1995).

IPO 1994, Bulgaria, Petrich



© Gerd Gerhardt



The hotel where the participants in the second IPO were accommodated

IPO 1995, Bulgaria, Stara Zagora



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The hotel where the participants in the third IPO were accommodated

IPO 1996, Turkey, Istanbul



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IPO 1997, Poland, Warsaw

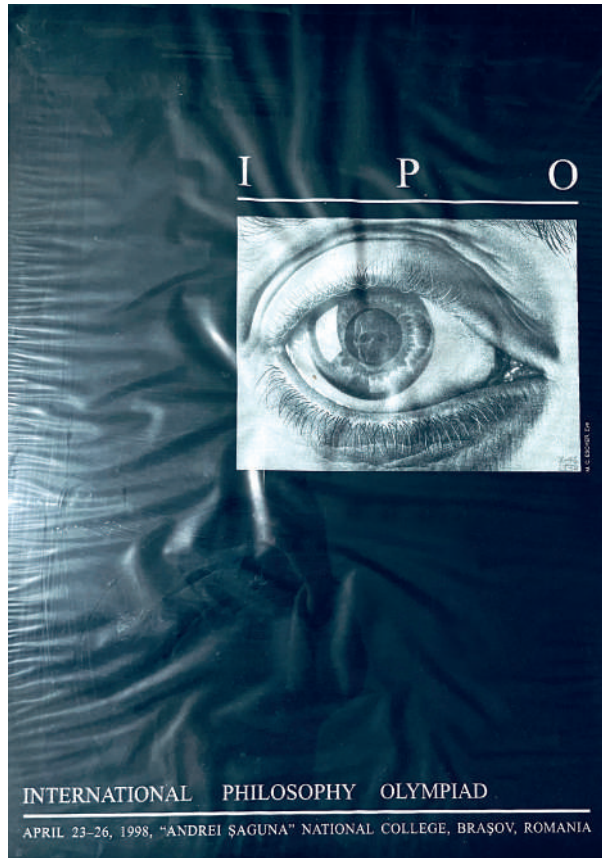


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IPO 1998, Romania, Brashov



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IPO 1999, Hungary, Budapest



Katalin Havas



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IPO 2000, Germany, Münster



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IPO 2001, USA, Philadelphia



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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0802

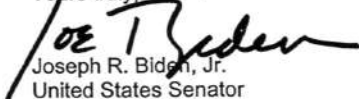
December 1, 2000

I am writing to commend you on the extraordinary work you have done organizing the upcoming International Philosophy Olympiad for High School Students. By partnering with the Federation International des Societes Philosophiques, the IPO is drawing upon the leading global philosophical organizations which has served to increase the already impressive number of supporters.

The list of international leaders and diplomats speaks volumes as to the importance of your work and the value of having high school students from all over the world have the opportunity to meet each other to debate philosophy. As the birthplace of the American experiment with democracy, Philadelphia seems an especially appropriate venue to bring together the youth of the world to discuss democracy and philosophy within the context of differing cultural values. It is the children of the world who will be entrusted to maintain the values of democracy which are flourishing all over the world. By understanding not just the principles of democracy, but also each other and the manifestations of democracy in other cultures, they will be able to pursue peaceful relationships in the future. The dialogue that will occur in Philadelphia is an important basis for these future relationships. It is for these reasons that I support your efforts to organize the International Philosophy Olympiad in Philadelphia next May.

Once again, congratulations on the outstanding progress you have made in organizing this event. I know that the event will be a success and will leave a lasting impression on all of its participants.

Yours truly,



Joe Biden

Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
United States Senator

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IPO 2002, Japan, Tokyo



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IPO 2003, Argentina, Buenos Aires



© Marcelo Lobosco



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IPO 2004, South Korea, Seoul



© Ji-Aeh



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IPO 2005, Poland, Warsaw



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IPO 2006, Italy, Cosenza



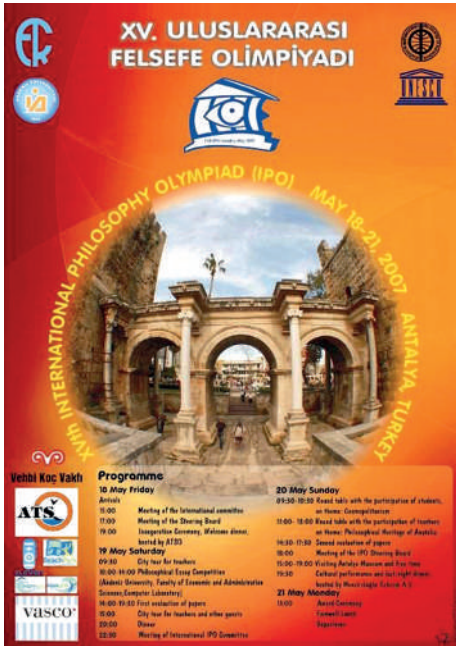
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IPO 2007, Turkey, Antalya



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IPO 2008, Romania, Iași



News

News1:

IPO Website has been completed. Feel free to surf and find the information you need

News2:

The Program for this year's IPO has been updated. You can view it at the program page by clicking [here](#).

Welcome to the XVth International Philosophy Olympiad, held in Iași, Romania during the 18th-22nd of May 2008.

Here you will find some useful information about the IPO including the IPO Manual, Regulations, Organizers, Program, History, News and some useful Links. In addition, you can contact the organizers using the contact form.

Since 1993, International Philosophy Olympiad (IPO) has been held each year for high school students, bringing together the winners of similar national contests, to engage in philosophical discourse. The aims of the IPO are

- * to promote philosophical education at secondary school level and increase the interest of high-school pupils in philosophy;
- * to contribute to the development of critical, inquisitive and creative thinking;
- * to promote philosophical reflection on science, art and social life;
- * to cultivate the capacity for ethical reflection on the problems of the modern world; and
- * by encouraging intellectual exchanges and securing opportunities for personal contacts between young people from different countries, to promote the culture of peace.

IPO Manual: [IPOManual.pdf](#)
 IPO Newsletter: [May2008.pdf](#)

MINISTERUL EDUCATIEI, CERCETĂRII ȘI TINERETULUI

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IPO 2009, Finland



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IPO 2010, Greece



© Michael Paroussis



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IPO 2011, Austria



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IPO 2012, Norway



© Thor Steinar Grødal



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IPO 2013, Denmark, Odense





IPO 2014, Lithuania



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IPO 2015, Estonia



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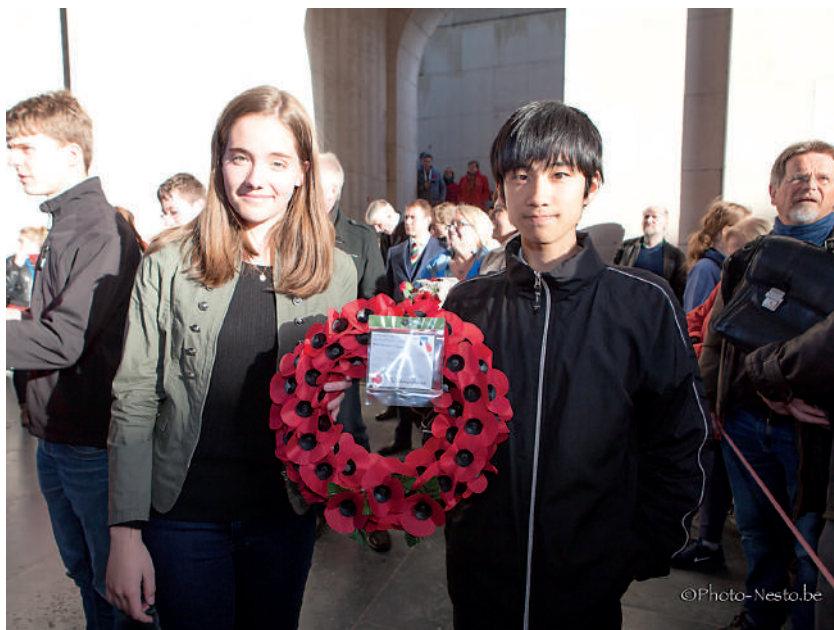


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IPO 2016, Belgium



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© Danny Praet & Pascal Vanhoecke

IPO 2017, The Netherlands, Rotterdam



© Ganesh van Boggelen



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IPO 2018, Montenegro





© Floris Velema

IPO 2019, Italy, Roma



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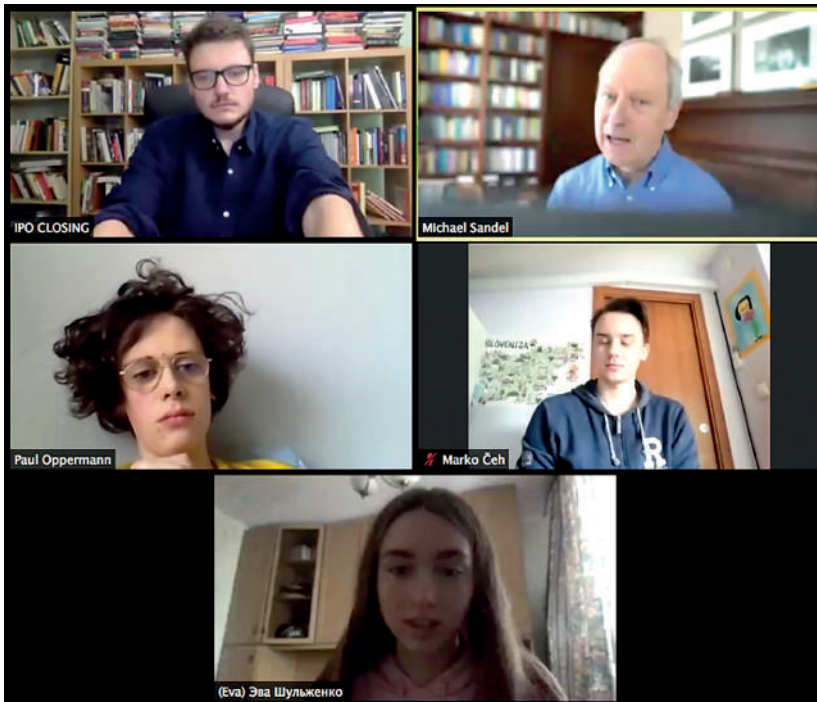


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e-IPO 2020, Slovenia



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e-IPO 2021, Slovenia



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IPO 2022, Portugal



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President of FISP

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EVOLVING WORLDS OF THE IPO

By the mid-2000s Ioanna Kuçuradi, who had been in charge of the International Federation of Philosophical Societies for over a decade, urged me to join the IPO on behalf of FISP. I was at first skeptical and even reluctant – for reasons that I can no longer remember. It was in 2010, when the IPO met in Athens upon invitation of the University of Patras and the Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University, that I could finally join this universe of the IPO community that, by then, was still unknown to me. For that occasion, Moufida Goucha, who ran UNESCO’s Division of Philosophy, had decided to make the trip to Athens; as one of her institutional partners, she asked me to join in her team.

That was the beginning of my durable presence at the IPO. After over ten editions, it is not only out of a sense of professional duty that I continue looking forward to the next Olympiad. I discovered a community of friends from whom it has become increasingly hard to part. As many other

colleagues from different areas of the world, I slowly became a part of this community; I learned to recognize, and to respect, its internal dynamics, its goals, its diverse yet always cooperative ideas, its different visions of the future and the development of the IPO itself.

Over the years, this community has remarkably expanded. Only three countries – Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey – attended the first edition of the IPO, held in Smolyan, Bulgaria, in May 1993. Today, students and teachers from over 50 countries throughout the world attend the IPO; languages include German, French, English, and Spanish; quotations systematically reflect disciplinary, cultural, geographic, and gender diversity. I consider this an outstanding achievement.

While the Olympiad was originally launched to promote and renew the study of philosophy in countries that had just gained a democratic regime, in the course of time the IPO has become a platform where we, as educators at either secondary or university levels, get to become familiar with students and colleagues from diverse cultures and regions, observe how they have been educated and how they will probably grow, how they develop different sensitivities and ways of working; we come to better understand our own students by observing how they interact with their peers from other cultures; we take mental notes of the different ways that they prepare for their IPO task, and sometimes these observations give us a glimpse of what the world might possibly look like in the future. It is a superb experience, one that enriches us spiritually and humanly year after year.

Because the IPO has also become a community of friends, we certainly miss those who used to be with us, and no longer are. I would like to mention here some of them, whom I have personally met: Juha Savolainen, Elo Pekka, Yael Cohen, Jurate Baranova... Together, they have built the IPO in the course of time, and we should definitely imagine a meaningful way to engrave their names in the mechanisms and initiatives of the Olympiads. I was glad to learn that a dedicated web page, ipomemory.wordpress.com, was created to pay tribute to the memory of all late IPO colleagues. And I hope for these few words to be read as a tribute to their commitment. At the same time, this short piece should also be seen as a sign of admiration for the steady engagement and dedication of all those who have been involved in the IPO since its inception in 1993. My gratitude goes in particular to the colleagues and friends who kindly invited me to tell my story in relation to the IPO: Nuran Direk, Florina Otet, Ivan Kolev, Gerd Gerhardt, and Jozef Niznik.

This overall joyful IPO community has not only grown in size, and enlarged its geographic and cultural boundaries; it generated all sorts of initiatives, networks, workshops, round tables... A new *Journal of Didactics of Philosophy* was launched upon initiative of Jonas Pfister and Philipp Richter; several IPO colleagues attended the last World Congresses of Philosophy; a website was created by Ivan Kolev, while a number of less theoretical ventures have steadily taken place in conjunction with the finals of the UEFA Champions League.

FISP has constantly and enthusiastically supported the IPO's development. Former President Ioanna Kuçuradi has vigorously supported the Olympiads, as did Presidents William McBride, Dermot Moran, and the late Peter Kemp. The participation of Steering Committee members such as Stelios Virvidakis, Gerhard Seel, Riccardo Pozzo, Noriko Hashimoto, Mislav Kukoč, Suwanna Satha-Anand, Lourdes Velázquez, as well as our late colleagues David Evans and Marcelo Dascal, reveals the commitment of FISP to enhance the IPO on a global scale, in order to involve and reflect a plurality of philosophical and cultural traditions.

But the IPO is first and above all about students. Regardless of what they would do in life – few if any of them will become professional philosophers – there are several reasons to believe that the IPO would mark a significant step in their growth. Through the sheer overall pleasure of the experience, it is likely to leave them with a penchant for philosophy, hence with a special gift in their personal and intellectual development. They will certainly find creative ways to use their philosophical skills to help build the society they will live in – its culture, its economy, its science, or its political governance. Above all, they will and (since many of them are now grown adults, and some do even attend the IPO as teachers) they actually do use these skills to carve out their own ways to interact with each other in respectful ways, doing their best to understand each other, to learn about each other, and to appreciate each other's traditions. Philosophy helps widen the boundaries of our self by educating our attitudes, our feelings, and our personality through a long and laborious process – one that medieval scholars in Europe called by the Latin word *itinerarium*, “way”, and Chinese philosophers through the matching word *dao* (道, “way”): a life-long training to overcome our selfishness and live in the world through a wider subjectivity than our individual self. Diversity, plurality, and respect are the key words here: not in view of a separate coexistence of a variety of cultures but, on the contrary, as a permanent effort to understand other civilizations, to study

them, to become increasingly familiar with them and, above all, to feel a sense of fellowship through interacting with our friends from different parts of the world. The sense of the universal condition of humanity, each of us carrying a different heritage and culture, is an essential constituency of the process of learning to be human; developing such feeling, in order to reach a deeper understanding of our own world and of our own personality, could certainly be considered as a fair outcome for an Olympiad.

The IPO is also an extraordinary opportunity to weave long-lasting friendships. “Being together with boys and girls from all continents, united by a passion for philosophy, was the real victory”, one the 2022 golden medalists, Giulia, declared. “For us, philosophy has been a bond, a medium through which we could interact and broaden our horizons.” Put like this, the gold medal seems to have been just a side bonus. “Of course I loved getting a medal; but it doesn’t really change the meaning of our experience. What was extraordinary was to talk about what is going on in our world with guys from other countries, and to do so from so many different points of view. Yes — I am delighted I won a medal, but that’s not really the essential”.

Tobias, the other 2022 winner, felt the same way. In his essay, he analyzed the theme of guilt and collective responsibility, starting from a quote by Hannah Arendt. “But the amazing thing was meeting new friends from all over the world, united by such similar interests. It’s all so different from the life I have back home that it seems almost unreal”. Tobias was planning to study history and economics, “but I will carry this experience with me for the rest of my life. The medal was fully unexpected – anyone who participates should do so because of the value of this experience.” One might rightfully argue that these youngsters are strikingly mature for their age. Yes – they are selected; yes – they are only partly representative of their generation; yet there is in their behavior something new, some novel feature, compared to the teenagers that we were, that can be steadily observed over the years. Perhaps, they are just better fit for an increasingly complex and diverse world, in which cooperating is more important than competing. They seem to be naturally aware of this transformation, and this is, after all, what makes the IPO so special: they know that they will return home changed, and that, regardless of any medal they might earn, they will have experienced a significant moment of growth. For most of them, they know that one does not grow just by winning, one also grows by losing, by being together, reasoning, discussing, and possibly loving in these few days they get to spend with each other.

The IPO is also a venue where those in charge of educating these youngsters can observe the dynamics specific to their young age, nurtured by their diversity and intellectual curiosity. Over the years, we have witnessed spectacular changes in attitudes, codes, and habits. Not too long ago, hardly any student carried a smartphone. They came with books, an old object that even the most solemn students are replacing with what they see as more suitable devices for the world they live in. Their learning experiences have changed according to the progressive widening of the IPO. Today, they seem much more comfortable to express themselves in different ways. Like Nate, who began to be home-schooled at the age of 15: he won the Thai national selection to attend the IPO in Lisbon, where he obtained a bronze medal. He never studied philosophy in school, but apparently read a lot of it. Or like those who increasingly defy gender conventions in the ways they dress, interact, or adorn themselves. While we adults still suffer through archaic political debates about gender issues, year after year the IPO provides a prospective look on the future of our world, as those who will live in it are actually conceiving it: we know that the power of their age will do away with all futile debates about what should or should not be done. They are already doing it.

Each edition of the Olympiad marks the beginning of new personal bonds. In many cases, also thanks to the opportunities offered by social media, these relationships will last for a long time. Every year, the last evening is all about exchanging addresses, leaving notes on each other's notebooks, hugging each other in groups of three, four, five, before they and their teachers depart for the airport or the train station. Increasingly though, leaving no longer carries with it the sad sense of finality it once did – we know that they will be in touch online, through a wealth of social media, sites, apps. How long can these early friendships last – sixty, seventy years? Perhaps longer? It is awe-inspiring to think that these global threads will contribute to form the human and intellectual fabric of the 21st century. For us, children of the 1960s, thinking that these ties may last into the 22nd century is a breathtaking thought.

This communal dimension makes the Philosophy Olympiad so valuable not just for the students but also for their teachers. The dynamics that these adolescents enact, how they present themselves, how they dress and interact, are by no means irrelevant signals for those in charge of guiding their maturation process. Over the years, we carefully observe those who wear traditional clothes and those who choose an evening gown even at

lunch, those who are at ease and those who do not shy away from their teachers, those who meet, in small groups, around the streets of Odense, Vienna, or Bar... These forms of interaction say a great deal about them and their ways of entering into relationships with others.

Much is also said by their writings. Let us refrain from giving them predetermined formats in composing a text. Instead, let us encourage them to see philosophy as a means of elaborating and expressing their personalities, feelings, and young experiences. Let us urge them to get off the beaten path, to seek criticism rather than commentary, to be irreverent, defiant, dissentient, resistant to patterns that risk to standardize their expression rather than enhance their individuality. No format would ever match the philosophical depth and intensity reached by a Korean participant in Gent 2016, who broke all rules in an essay commenting on the famous de Beauvoir's statement that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". By using this dictum as a springboard in a particularly creative manner, this student elaborated on her experience as a young girl who does not feel like a woman, but whom her society is harshly pushing to become a woman. The essay had some imperfections, perhaps even inaccuracies: however, should I think of an essay that embodies the spirit, goals, and sense of the IPO, of all the years I attended it I would have no hesitation in pointing towards this one.

Sometimes, however, students do seem afraid of erring by being too original. Too many writings have followed the same format and reasoning; too many self-restrictions imposed out of a fear of making mistakes. At eighteen, does one not have both the right and the duty to transgress, to try to breach all rules in writing?

It is, in short, a complex process of generational formation, a society in its making, that we see unraveling in this vital and culturally diverse microcosm that is the Philosophical Olympiad. On the eve of its 30th year, though, not everything is just about philosophy. The reference to "what is going on in our world", as the 2022 winner put it, was not innocent. Since 2022, after two years of online editions due to the pandemic, the IPO is facing an unprecedented situation.

During the opening ceremony of the 2022 IPO in Lisbon, the Minister of Education of Portugal, João Costa, paid a long, emotional tribute to the Ukrainian delegation. Natalia Lehka and Liubov Terekhova, who led the Ukrainian team, had to travel for days to get to Lisbon. "Talking, exchanging ideas, making our voices heard is important to us," they explained. "We

all need to take our minds off the war, if only for a few days. Working is essential to endure in these conditions. And philosophy helps us live in a broader horizon than the everydayness of war. It is our way of rejoining a normal life, where we can also talk about philosophy, not just war and bombs”. The organizing committee of the Olympia IPO, in 2023, decided to follow in Portugal’s steps and did not extend an invitation to the delegations of Russia and Belarus. It would be yet another ground for an in-depth discussion among student and teachers at the 31st IPO, taking into account a plurality of stances, ideas, and positions.

Supplements

STATUTE OF THE INTERNATIONAL PHILOSOPHICAL OLYMPIAD, 1997

(philosophical competition of the pupils of high-schools)

I. ORGANIZATION AND COMMITTEE

1. The International Philosophical Olympiad (IPO) is organized each year in spring. Its participants are pupils of the high-schools.
2. The IPO is led by an international Committee. It comprises representatives of all countries participating in IPO (usually the organizers of national competitions).
3. The Committee of IPO determines each year the country which will organize the competition the next year.
4. The position of President of the Committee of IPO is changing: he (she) is this member of the Committee who organizes the competitions for the current year. The Secretariat of IPO is located in Bulgaria, in the Dept. of Philosophy of Sofia University.
5. The President invites 3 persons from each country which will take part in the IPO: 2 pupils (who remain unnamed) and 1 professor (teacher of philosophy) as member of the Jury. The number of participants of the country where the competition takes place can exceed 2.
6. The organizers cover all expenses connected with the stay of the invited persons during the competition (4 days including the days of arrival and departure). Everybody has to cover the cost of travel by himself (or find a sponsor).
7. The 3 winners receive the awards in cash. Others receive books or other souvenirs.

8. IPO lasts 2 days. The first day in the morning the meeting of the Jury, then the competition (examination), in the afternoon the work of the Jury. The second day in the morning the announcement of the results, the delivery of awards and certificates, the announcement of the country in which the next IPO will take place, etc.

II. COMPETITION (EXAMINATION)

1. There is only a written examination: every participant writes an essay on one of topics proposed by the Jury.
2. The Jury proposes 4-5 topics stated on the meeting in the morning before the examination. They are either some philosophical problems or quotation from known philosophers which should be commented.
3. The essay must be written in one of the following languages: English, French, German. However, it must not be a mother language of the author (e.g. a German does not write in German).
4. The time of writing – 4 hours.
5. The names are encoded and not known to the jurors.

III. THE JURY AND THE PROCESS OF EVALUATION

1. The Jury consists of invited professors (teachers of philosophy) . Each country is represented in the Jury.
2. Every essay must be read by at least 3 members of the Jury. It is divided in at least 3 groups, according to language. There may be 2 or more groups for one language.
3. Each member of the Jury assesses the essay according to the criteria given below, awarding a number of points. The average is calculated. The ranking (order) of all essays is determined by that average.
4. The best essays (candidates for the prizes) are read by more members of the Jury, if possible, by all , what may change the averages. In controversial cases, after a discussion, the voting of all members of the Jury determines the outcome.

5. Then the names are decoded. Minutes containing the ranking are signed by all members of the Jury.

IV. CRITERIA OF EVALUATION The essays are assessed according to the following criteria:

1. The knowledge (of the history of philosophy),
2. The originality, the own ideas, i.e. the skill of independent thinking.
3. The skill of argumentation for or against some theses.
4. The correctness of the language.

The maximal amount of points is, as follows;

• Knowledge.	30 p.
• Originality.	30 p.
• Argumentation	30 p.
• Language	10 p.
• Total amount	100 p.

LETTER FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE OF IPO

We use always the name INTERNATIONAL PHILOSOPHICAL OLYMPIAD (IPO) in order to distinguish it from the (national) PHILOSOPHICAL OLYMPIAD (PO) existing in Poland and some other countries. On the base of the material about the IPO from the last year, we elaborated:

1. Program of IPO;
2. Statute of IPO. We add information about PO in Poland.

We made some changes in to Assessment Criteria. Both originality and argumentation are essential parts of the skill for philosophical reflection, hence we replaced it by knowledge which is also important for philosophical reflection. We changed the number of points in order to have the total 100. Besides, we don't determine the number of participants from the host-country. We intend to have in the 1997 IPO 4 participants from Poland. We will organize the 1997 IPO in 2-3 May (the 3-th May is in Poland a holiday).

Władysław Krajewski

PROGRAM OF THE INTERNATIONAL PHILOSOPHICAL OLYMPIAD
(philosophical competition of the high school pupils)

I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A meeting of experts held in UNESCO Headquarters in February 1995 (in connection with UNESCO's project on "Philosophy and Democracy in the World") decided to promote the "organization of national and international competitions along the lines of philosophy 'Olympiads' with the aim of encouraging the practice of philosophical analysis and stimulating, through competition, the interest of young people in philosophy". The International Philosophical Olympiad (IPO) started earlier, in 1993. Three times, in 1993-95, it was organized in Bulgaria by the Department of Philosophy of the Sofia University. 5 countries participated those: Bulgaria, Turkey, Romania, Poland and Germany. In 1995, during the third IPO, the international Committee for IPO was created: Alexander Andonov (Bulgaria), Nuran Direk (Turkey), Władysław Krajewski (Poland), Florina Otet (Romania), Gerd Gerhardt (Germany). Each year the representative of the country organizing IPO that year becomes the President of the Committee and representative of the country which organizes IPO next year becomes the Vice-President. Ivan Kolev (Bulgaria) has been appointed as permanent Secretary of the Committee. The fourth IPO took place in Turkey (Istanbul), organized by the Division of Philosophy for Children of the Turkish Philosophical Society. Six countries participated in it: Hungary joined the above mentioned five countries. Katalin Havas became the sixth member of the Committee of IPO. The fifth IPO will be organized in 1997 in Poland by the Chief Committee of Philosophical Olympiad. It has the intention to invite more countries than before.

II. OBJECTIVES

1. To encourage creative thinking and the spirit of inquiry among pupils, by showing the values inherent in intellectual efforts.
2. To stimulate competitive aspects of intellectual activity.
3. To promote the philosophical reflection about science, art and social life.
4. To cultivate the skill of ethical reflection on the problems of the modern world.
5. To promote humanistic education and humanistic thinking in high schools.

III. GENERAL TOPICS

1. What is philosophy?
2. Ontology (diversity of outlooks).
3. Philosophy and science (epistemology).
4. Philosophy and art.
5. Philosophy and civil society (open society).
6. Ethics.

IV. PHILOSOPHERS

Pupils participating in the IPO must know some of the main ideas of the following philosophers:

Socrates, Democritus, Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, F. Bacon, R. Descartes, B. Spinoza, G.W. Leibniz, J. Locke, G. Berkeley, D. Hume, I. Kant, G.W.F. Hegel, K. Marx, A. Schopenhauer, J. St. Mill, H. Spencer, F. Nietzsche, Ch. S. Peirce, E. Husserl, H. Bergson, B. Russell, L. Wittgenstein, M. Heidegger, J.P. Sartre, R. Carnap, K.P. Popper, T.S. Kuhn.

It is necessary to encourage high school pupils to study works of these philosophers, and also to use handbooks and other books on philosophy.

International Philosophy Olympiad

(Organized under the auspices of the International Federation of Philosophical Societies and UNESCO)

Regulations concerning the organization of the International Philosophy Olympiads

Preamble

The International Philosophy Olympiads (IPO), which is a competition for high-school pupils, first took place in 1993, by an initiative of the Department of Philosophy of Sofia University to invite a group of philosophers from various countries. The founding members were: Ivan Kolev (Bulgaria), Gerd Gerhardt (Germany), Katalin Havas (Hungary), Wladislaw Krajewski (Poland), Florina Otet (Romania), Nuran Direk (Turkey). These Olympiads have also been welcomed by UNESCO (see "Conclusions of the International Study Days: Philosophy and Democracy in the World", 15-16 February 1995).

Since 2001 the International Philosophy Olympiads have been organized under the auspices of FISP and with the recognition and support of UNESCO.

These Regulations were prepared in accordance with the wish of the International Committee of IPO to cooperate with FISP in the organization of the Olympiads, expressed in its letter of May 9, 1999, and in accordance with FISP Statutes (art. 2/f). They were approved, in their original version, by the IPO Organizing Committee in its meeting held in Münster on May 5, 2000, and subsequently by the Steering Committee of FISP in its meeting held in Istanbul, on September 16, 2000.

1. Objectives

The objectives of the IPO are:

- to promote philosophical education at the secondary school level and increase the interest of high school pupils in philosophy;
- to encourage the development of national, regional, and local contests in philosophy among pre-university students worldwide;
- to contribute to the development of critical, inquisitive and creative thinking;
- to promote philosophical reflection on science, art, and social life;
- to cultivate the capacity for ethical reflection on the problems of the modern world; and,
- by encouraging intellectual exchanges and securing opportunities for personal contacts between young people from different countries, to promote the culture of peace.

2. Organization

The IPO is organized every year in May, by one of the participating countries. Participation in IPO will require a commitment on the part of the national delegations to promote the study of Philosophy in their home country and to organize a national competition in Philosophy.

The IPO is open to pupils from every country in the world who are enrolled in high school, either at the time of the competition, or, in countries where the school year ends in December in the year before, or earlier than May the same year, even if they are enrolled at a university at the time of the IPO.

The maximum age of a pupil is 20.

The National Organizing Committee of the host country may decide to adopt a leading theme of the Olympiad. Such a theme, however, will be used only for the series of lectures and workshops offered to the participants and should not be reflected in the selection of contest topics. The contest topics should reflect a variety of philosophical disciplines.

Each country can participate with one or two pupils, with the exception of the host country, which may participate with a maximum of 10 pupils.

The selection of the pupils who will participate in an International Philosophy Olympiad is made after competitions organized at the national level; but in exceptional cases other methods may be followed subject to the approval of the Steering Board. These national competitions should be organized by, or under the auspices of, a national philosophical society which is a member of FISP. If a national society does not exist or if, though it exists, it is not willing to organize the national Olympiads, or if another method has been pursued in the past, other procedures may be followed, but in all cases these procedures are subject to the approval of the Steering Board of the International Philosophy Olympiads.

3. Administration of the IPO

The administration of the IPO is carried out by the following bodies:

a) The International Committee consists of the delegation leaders of all those countries that have already organized an IPO.

The International Committee of the IPO will meet every year on the occasion of the Olympiads, and will discuss measures to be taken for the future development of IPO. It is chaired by the Executive Board in cooperation with the President of the current National Organizing Committee.

The IC chooses three delegation members as the Executive Board of the IPO for two years.

Each year it chooses three delegation members from countries that have hosted an IPO (IC member countries) to represent it on the Steering Board and makes a decision concerning the country in which the next Olympiads will take place. The International Committee has the right to exclude from the IPO persons who, or delegations which, have violated IPO regulations.

The International Committee is also authorized to elect some of its members to consider proposals for changes in these statutes and to prepare a report on these proposals in collaboration with the FISP members of the Steering Board. Proposals agreed to by a 2/3 majority of the International Committee will then be reported to the FISP Steering Committee.

b) The Executive Board of the IPO consists of the three IC-members, elected by the IC for the next two years. (The term begins on 1 July. Re-election possible after two years, then two-year break before possible next re-election.)

The Executive Board decides by simple majority. Info re decisions of importance shall be sent to all IC members within 10 days. Decisions can be changed by the IC with a simple majority.

The Board is entitled to delegate certain of its tasks to one or more members of the IC or the International Jury. Board members may be removed by the IC for just cause, in particular if the Board member has violated her/his obligations towards the IPO, in particular the Code of Ethics, or if the Board member is not in a position to exercise her/his functions correctly. Board members may resign at any time by submitting a written declaration to the IC.

c) The Steering Board of the IPO consists of:

- the President of FISP (or his/her representative), and two other members of the FISP Steering Committee and/or representatives chosen by it;
- three members of the International Committee, elected each year by it.

It is chaired by the President of FISP (or his/her representative).

This Board collaborates with the Executive Board and the IPO National Organizing Committee for the successful preparation and realization of the competition. In particular it helps with the diffusion of information through the FISP Newsletter and in other ways, helps the National Organizing Committee to find international financial support for the IPO, decides on the distribution of prizes, and in case of any dispute concerning the distribution of prizes takes the final decision.

d) The National Organizing Committee.

The host country will establish a National Organizing Committee. The National Organizing Committee is constituted each year from June 1 to May 31 and is responsible for organizing the annual IPO. It is expected to coordinate its planning with the International Committee and to keep it informed of its decisions. After the IPO is held, the National Organizing Committee will send a full report of the competition and its outcome to the International Committee, to the Steering Board, to the FISP Steering Committee, and to the other participants.

e) The International Jury consists of all the delegation leaders and teachers (max. two per country, except three, including the delegation leader, from the previous host country).

All members of the International Jury are required to have a degree that allows them to teach philosophy at high schools/secondary schools or universities in their own country, or have a demonstrated competence for acting as a member of the International Jury. The Organizing Committee of each IPO, in co-operation with the Steering Board, will decide on possible issues regarding new members of the International Jury.

f) The Ethics Committee can be approached by any participant in the IPO, student or teacher, that feels treated unjustly in any way. In case of a complaint, the main task of the Ethics Committee is to mediate between all parties concerned. If the matter cannot be resolved, the final decision always lies with the International Committee. In such an event, the Ethics Committee informs the International Committee in so far as a regard for the privacy of the persons involved will allow.

The Ethics Committee consists of three elected members, two of which must come from countries that have previously hosted an IPO (the International Committee). No more than one member can be elected from the International Jury at large, but this person needs to be a long-standing IPO participant.

During the election of the Ethics Committee, gender diversity must always be taken into account. The members of the Ethics Committee are elected by the International Committee every second year and receive a mandate for two consecutive years. Members of the Ethics Committee can be re-elected for another mandate of two years. Membership to the Ethics Committee is thereby limited to four years.

The Organizing Committee of the host country will send the names and email-addresses of the Ethics Committee members to all invited participants, and will put this information on their official website, including a short biography of each Ethics Committee member.

4. The Competition

a) Before March 1 of the year of the competition, each delegation leader is expected to send one proposal of a topic to the Secretary General of FISP. This proposal (a short quotation – not longer than five lines – or a question) must be submitted in at least one of the IPO languages and it must include the correct source. These proposals will be circulated among the FISP members of the Steering Board, who will select four topics from among those sent and/or other topics of their choice. The topics selected will be printed in all four IPO languages.

They will be provided with the sources according to academic rules. Quotations will be provided in the best available translation, and with bibliographic data according to academic standards. If no good translation(s) is (are) available, the Secretary General of FISP will provide (a) new translation(s), mentioning the translator(s) by name.

b) Writing the Essays

I. Every student writes an essay on one of the four topics given to them.

II. The essay must be written in one of the following languages: English, German, French, Spanish; however, it must not be written in the official language(s) of the student's state (e.g., a German does not write in German).

The only aid that may be used during the students' essay-writing are bi-lingual dictionaries in the pupils' own language and one of the official IPO languages (English/German/French/Spanish), and mono-lingual dictionaries in one of the official IPO languages. Such dictionaries must be in paper versions, not in any electronic format.

III. The time of writing is 4 hours.

IV. The names of the authors of all essays are encoded and not known to the assessors until the final ranking is fixed.

c) Grading the essays

I. The criteria of evaluation are: relevance to the topic, philosophical understanding of the topic, persuasive power of argumentation, coherence, and originality.

II. Each assessor gives his or her marks on a scale of 1 to 10 points, from 7 points upwards using intervals of .5.

- 7.5-10 points means: I suggest this essay for the next stage.
- 6-7 points means: I myself don't suggest this essay, but I will agree if somebody else selects this essay.
- 1-5 points means: I suggest that this essay should not be accepted for the next stage.

III. At the first stage of the grading each essay is marked by four assessors. If there are more than 3 points of difference among the individual marks, a fifth assessor will be appointed. At the end of the first stage all the essays which have received an average grade of at least 7 points are selected for the second stage.

IV. At the second stage each remaining essay is marked by two additional assessors.

The average mark of an essay is calculated on the basis of all the marks it has received – both the marks of the assessors at the first stage and the marks of the two assessors at the second stage. At the end of the second stage the Jury of the IPO selects as many of the best essays as it wishes for consideration in the third stage.

V. At the third stage the Steering Board will decide on the distribution of prizes.

5. Awards

Awards are symbolic “medals”: golden, silver, and bronze, and honorable mention. The Steering Committee may grant more than one medal in each category.

6. Other Points

- a) English is the working language of the International Philosophy Olympiad. All participants need to be able to communicate in English.
- b) All forms of cheating, all kinds of harassment, the use of drugs and abuse of alcohol, and all other violations of the spirit of the IPO, either on the side of teachers or students, may be punished with disqualification or exclusion from the IPO by the International Committee, upon consultation with the Ethics Committee. An exclusion from the IPO requires a 2/3 majority of the International Committee.
- c) The date of the International Philosophy Olympiad is announced and communicated every year by the President of the National Organizing Committee to all participating countries before October 1. He or she also sends a letter of invitation to those who express their intention before December 1 to participate in the next Olympiad.
- d) The host country undertakes to provide, at a minimum, the accommodation (including meals) expenses of two pupils and one teacher (delegation member) from each country, as well as members of the Steering Board and the International Committee who are not otherwise covered.
- e) The National Organizing Committee decides about the value of the prizes to be offered to the winners of the competition.
- f) The public and guests are invited to the opening and closing ceremonies; admission of guests to other activities of the IPO must be approved by the International Committee.
- g) The secretariat of the International Committee of IPO is located in the Department of Philosophy of Sofia University, Bulgaria. It is charged with the task of preparing and maintaining the archival records as follows:
 - o The list of topics used at the Olympiads,
 - o The essays written by the participants,
 - o The minutes of the Olympiads,
 - o Internet resources for the Olympiads (www.philosophy-olympiad.org)
 - o All other relevant material.It prepares the Bulletin of IPO.

These revised rules of the IPO have been adopted, in accordance with existing statutes, by consensus of a combined meeting of the Steering Board and the Organizing Committee held in Istanbul, September 4 and 5, 2006. The rules were revised through a minimum 2/3 majority of the International Committee through votes by e-mail December 06, 2017-February 28, 2018, February 13 - March 4, 2019 and June 17- 25, 2019 and Oct 1-17, 2022.

1993. 1st IPO. Bulgaria, Smolyan.

„Home is far more a state of mind than landscape.“ (Gaston Bachelard).

1994. 2nd IPO. Bulgaria, Petrich.

„To be a philosopher means to travel all the time; questions in philosophy are more essential than answers.“ (Karl Jaspers)

1995. 3rd IPO. Bulgaria, Stara Zagora.

„Actually it is impossible for us to consider ourselves non-existent.“
(Miguel de Unamuno).

1996. 4th IPO. Türkiye, Istanbul.

„The limits of your language are the limits of your world.“
(Ludwig Wittgenstein).

1997. 5th IPO. Poland, Warsaw.

Is philosophy a science?

1998. 6th IPO. Romania, Brashov.

„We see the world the way we want to see it.“ (Arthur Schopenhauer)

1999. 7th IPO. Hungary, Budapest.

Is knowledge a power?

2000. 8th IPO. Germany, Münster.

„All men naturally desire knowledge.“ (Aristotle)

2001. 9th IPO. USA, Philadelphia.

„The laws of conscience, which we pretend to be derived from nature, proceed from custom.“ (Michel de Montaigne)

2002. 10th IPO, Japan, Tokyo.

„Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.“
(George Santayana)

2003. 11th IPO, Argentina, Buenos Aires.

„The maxims of the philosophers on the conditions under which public peace is possible shall be consulted by states which are armed for war.“
(Immanuel Kant)

2004. 12th IPO. South Korea, Seoul.

„In fact, history does not belong to us, but we belong to history.“
(Hans-Georg Gadamer)

2005. 13th IPO. Poland, Warsaw.

„Language is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from one side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about.“ (Ludwig Wittgenstein)

2006. 14th IPO. Italy, Cosenza.

„To know a thing we must love it, and to love a thing we must know it.“
(Kitaro Nishida)

2007. 15th IPO. Türkiye, Antalya.

„Space is not in the subject , nor is the world in space.“ (Martin Heidegger)