

Fotis Kafatos, distinguished Greek biologist, dies at 77

November 19 2017, by Demetris Nellas

Fotis Kafatos, a Greek molecular biologist who had a distinguished academic career in both the United States and Europe and became the founding president of the European Research Council, has died. He was 77.

His family announced his death in Heraklion, Crete on Saturday "after a long illness." on Saturday.

Born in Crete in 1940, Kafatos was known for his research on malaria and for sequencing the genome of the mosquito that transmits the disease.

He was a professor at Harvard University during 1969-1994, where he also served as chairman of the Cellular and Developmental Biology Department, and at Imperial College in London since 2005. He had been an adjunct professor at the Harvard School of Public Health since 2007.

Kafatos was also a part-time professor at the University of Crete in his hometown since 1982. He also was the third director of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory, a life sciences research organization funded by multiple countries, from 1993 to 2005.

Kafatos considered the 2007 founding of the European Research Council under the auspices of the European Commission as his crowning achievement. The council funds and promotes projects driven by researchers. He stepped down as founding president in 2010.

He came to be disillusioned by the heavily bureaucratic rules that, in his mind, hampered research.

"We continuously had to spend energy, time and effort on busting bureaucracy roadblocks that kept appearing in our way," Kafatos told scientific journal Nature soon after left the post. But, he added, "we delivered to Europe what we promised."

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