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PRESS RELEASE

**Program “IASON” of AUTH: 31 Years of Outreach and Cultural
Diplomacy in the Wider Black Sea Region**

Thessaloniki, July 18, 2025

This year, for the 31st consecutive time, the Greek language and culture courses of the “IASON” Program of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) were successfully completed.

From June 23 to July 18, 2025, eighteen top-performing students from nine leading universities in Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Kazakhstan attended intensive online Greek language courses at the School of Modern Greek Language (SMGL) of AUTH. At the same time, they participated in a cultural immersion program that included academic lectures and virtual visits to museums and archaeological sites in Thessaloniki and Macedonia.

During the online closing ceremony held on July 16, the Vice-Rector for International Relations, Outreach, Lifelong Learning, and Student Welfare — and Scientific Director of the “IASON” Program — Professor Iakovos Michailidis, praised the program's role as one of AUTH's most significant international outreach initiatives. *“We will further strengthen the 'IASON' Program, which demonstrates the power of culture to bring people closer together. It is a historic and valuable initiative that connects Greece with the cultural heritage of Southeastern Europe and the Black Sea region,”* he noted.

A particularly moving moment was when the students, speaking fluent Greek, presented their home universities and expressed their gratitude to AUTH, the administration, and their instructors for the invaluable experience and knowledge they gained.

The meeting was also attended by professors from the students' home universities, many of whom were former "IASON" scholarship recipients and now serve as professors of Greek, department heads, or directors of centers for Hellenic studies.

Professor Despoina Papadopoulou, President of the SMGL, highlighted the long-standing and fruitful collaboration between the School and the Program, emphasizing "IASON's" contribution to fostering a productive cultural dialogue and promoting intercultural coexistence between Greece and the countries of the Black Sea region.

The Program Director, Dr. Dimitris Fotiadis, noted that "IASON" is now entering its fourth decade, underlining the vision of its founders - Professors Ioannis Kazazis and Artemis Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou - to "bring the Golden Fleece back to the Black Sea" through the Greek language and culture. "Long before the terms *outreach* and *innovation* became common, AUTH - through 'IASON' - showed what they truly mean in practice. It is an honor to see young people sending messages of friendship and peace to the world through our language."

Today, the "IASON" Program stands as one of AUTH's most important institutions of cultural diplomacy and scientific cooperation, building relationships of friendship, respect, and collaboration with universities in the broader Black Sea and Southeastern Europe regions.

We kindly request that this event be published, broadcast, and covered by the media.