Alexander Athanasiadis (Alekos, for his friends and colleagues) had a first contact with Portuguese science through Diana Plácido, a PhD student at the ITQB, who spent a couple of years in Alex Rich laboratory at the MIT, under Alekos supervision. In the acknowledgements of her Thesis, Diana wrote "I also thank to Alekos for everything he taught me, from protein production to critical thinking and for motivating me to grow as a young scientist". Alekos knew a lot more than protein production, but we tend to agree that his human qualities – critical thinking, openness, entirety, ability to inspire younger (and older) colleagues, are to be underlined first. And we strongly believe that everyone who got to know Alekos agrees to these statements, including the many dozens of students Alekos helped to become scientists.

Some years later, one of us (MAC) managed to attract him to Portugal, first for a visit, but soon to work on a project between ITQB and IGC: MAC was interested in left-handed DNA and its interactions with proteins, AC was interested in TLRs, one of which was known to bind DNA. Together, we supported Alekos successful application for a Marie Curie Fellowship, and he moved to Oeiras in 2008. He stayed at the IGC ever since, as a group leader for most of this time, after approval of the IGC's SAB in 2009.

Alekos' presence in Oeiras was a most beautiful story: liked by everyone, he inspired all of us, students and peers, in public seminars or in private discussions, exchanging on scientific matters and otherwise, his broad knowledge and intelligence being a constant source of pleasure for all; most generously, Alekos was always ready to help and contribute to the common enterprise of science and rational knowledge. The spirit and atmosphere in a scientific institution are constructed and enjoyed by all its members, some more than others. A quite exceptional person and scientist, Alekos had a large share in making the Oeiras campus what it is today.

Oeiras, August 13, 2020

Maria Arménia Carrondo
António Coutinho