

Reservations and criticisms of the plan for the port in the south

Professor Kostas Synolakis, from the Technical University of Crete, speaks to « Patris »

From Korina Kafetzopoulou

While the officials of Heraklion and Rethymnon and the community of the south [of Crete] are wondering about the opportunity of building the transshipment port, and about the changes that it is expected to bring not only to their lives but also to the environment, Professor Kostas Synolakis, professor in natural disasters at the Technical University of Crete, and professor of environmental engineering at the University of South California, has increased the uncertainties around this project.

He seems to give a scientific « No » to the project, and expresses doubts regarding the existing studies, even in their preliminary state, which have been done by his colleagues from the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA).

Speaking to « Patris », he declares outright that he is not convinced that the measures proposed to counteract the environmental impact will be sufficient, and finds it almost inconceivable that this scientific study has been done without taking into account two basic parameters: the waves and the currents in the affected area.

Because of the draft and amateurish character of the NTUA study, Professor Synolakis fears that the beach of the south will disappear,

since we know from similar errors made in the past that the island's beaches are very susceptible to erosion.

Professor Synolakis insists that the environmental impact study for the transshipment port has been done without the waves and currents being measured. « Is it possible? It is like setting up wind generators without studying the winds. » he asks, before adding:

« Before building in the south one of the biggest ports in the world, you must estimate its potential impact. The NTUA have not presented any information regarding the waves, nor how the impacts of the project on the environment could be controlled.

Will it be possible to control them? How? How much will it cost? Where will the money required for the protection of the sea environment come from?

We (the team of the Polytechnic of Crete) estimate that, if the port is finally built, the regeneration of 10 km of the Timbaki beach will cost 100 million euros.

This amount has not been estimated in the environmental study.

Let's have them say where they'll find this money. »

He added that he and his team completed an initial assessment of the consequences of this large project, because of their interest in the area. When we asked him if the Heraklion Port Authority had requested their opinion on the subject, he answered:

« Nobody asked us to give our opinion. We are Cretan, though. We care about our region a little bit more than the ones who are not from here. Since we know the inaptitude with which similar port projects have been made, and their consequences on the north coast, we decided to study the subject. »

Professor Synolakis' team concludes that the consequences of the port will spread as far as Matala, and that more than 100 million euros will be needed to fix them.

« We know the cost of the regeneration of the beach. Erosion will happen, and wave-breakers will have to



be set in the sea. This type of wave-breaker costs 1 million euros per 100 meters. Who will give this money for the protection of the beach? »

Professor Synolakis not only has strong reservations about the consequences of the project, but also regarding the work of the scientists from the NTUA.

He does not support the project: « To support the project, I would need to be convinced that they have thought about everything and that they have found the money for the regeneration of the beach. Who will pay for that? We, as taxpayers, or the municipality of Timbaki? Actually, the beach will be lost. This is what will happen. »

And he added:

« They do not think about the simplest solution to save the beach: its enrichment with the sand coming from the dredging.

They don't have information about the waves, but they estimate that there will be erosion. Is it possible that the rector of the NTUA, without using the word « enrichment », speaks of using detached wave-breakers? Is it possible that, without any information regarding the waves, an academic professor says with such certainty that this is the solution?

How did they agree to do such a study without information about the waves? It is strange that they did such a thing. It is terrible. »

His questions do not stop here. They are also related to the port of Kokkinos Pirgos, which has an impact on the coasts of Agia Galini, since it prevents the currents transporting sand westwards. For this reason, the sand stays in the port, which needs dredging nearly every year.

Concerning both projects, Professor Synolakis spoke again about the lack of information about waves and streams and said that, unfortunately, here, such large projects are usually done « at cursory glance ». He added that the fact that Kokkinos Pirgos port had been made in such an amateur way was incredible.

The professor also expressed his concerns in the form of a complaint against vested interests:

« I have ended up coming to the cynical conclusion that the vested interests are enormous. In Chania, there is a supplier that makes all port works. »

At this point, we asked Professor Synolakis how he interprets the fact that the NTUA was asked for its opinion and not the Technical University of Crete. He answered that it was not unexpected, since a close relationship is noted between the port authorities, the related contractors and the NTUA.

