

**International Science Writers  
Association**

# **News.ISWA**

Volume 2 Issue 5

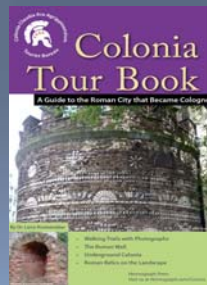
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[www.internationalsciencewriters.org](http://www.internationalsciencewriters.org)

## **President's Letter — ISWA Lives or Dies By Its Mem- bers**



*Dr. Larry Krumenaker*

The time January-March was a hectic time. The ISWA Board met numerous times, in an attempt to increase the momentum of the organization. We did catch up on leftovers from the previous Board. We brainstormed and searched and plotted ideas for the future. Now we are trying to form workgroups to work on specific projects: an academic science communication course that anyone can take for credit, a workshop on teaching researchers how to deal with the press, and maybe a science journalism podcast. We also have (dim) hopes for a meeting somewhere this year, though where seems always to 'not pan out.'

Among the leftovers were clearing up a variety of constitutional conflicts and unclear statements. We bought (for the first time!) plaques for retiring Board members. To move forward, the Board internally ran a Brainstorm Survey, gathering ideas of things ISWA could do. Three pages full of ideas. Then we spent nearly six hours discussing pros and cons and grading them in terms of do-ability and prioritizing them. We had those we thought to do urgently, while the proverbial iron was hot, those to hold off, and those to do when an opportunity arose. All over the next two years, but to start and move now and as rapidly as possible.

The first items we're trying are, in no particular order, finding places to have meetings, to research and possibly create an academic course (for credit, not just a certificate) on science communication, a workshop on helping scientists work with the press, a podcast, and an increase in our social media presence. For the last, that has increased some—we are on Twitter and our Facebook page has steady postings. For the others, we are just now establishing workgroups to work on the issues.

But the problems are immense. We are a small group, and a small Board scattered over many time zones. Our Board meeting start times range locally from 630AM to 10PM; hard to get all of us all the time. But also it is just a LOT to do...and the Board can not do it on its own. We need members to step up and help out on the problems. And with our small group, that is not happening as much as it should. Yes, you are busy. So are we all. What of it?

Financially we are in the best shape we've ever been. We have a better than equilibrium situation, where more members have joined than left. It would be nice to be able to move this inertia-bound organization forward, but turning this ship requires help.

Please help.

Meanwhile, this issue is dedicated to the topic of Science Journalism around the world. Specifically, Iran, Colombia, and Greece. Enjoy.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Lawrence E. Krumenaker".

*Dr. Larry Krumenaker was a US expatriate, alternating between Cologne, Germany and Atlanta, USA. For the remainder of 2017, he expects to be in the USA, based in Alabama but traveling extensively around the US (and Helsinki in August) on book tours. Trained as an astronomer, he writes about science and history, occasionally teaches at universities and in workshops. He can be reached at [president@internationalsciencewriters.org](mailto:president@internationalsciencewriters.org).*

*News.ISWA is the newsletter, published irregularly, of the International Science Writers Association. Find us at [www.internationalsciencewriters.org](http://www.internationalsciencewriters.org). Based now in the USA, at ISWA c/o Krumenaker, 7742 Spalding Drive, #427, Norcross, GA 30092 USA. © 2017 ISWA.*

## **ISWA Announcements**

### **Constitutional Tweaks Vote: Clarifications, and Immediate Past President Position Created. Voted on by 11 of 29 members, all in favor.**

These concerned conflicts between existing clauses on changing the Constitution and regarding Board structure—to wit, roles of the President and Secretary, taking care of vacancies, the time lengths of referenda and elections were in conflict, creating the Immediate Past President option and role. There were some clauses dealing with situations now expired. Some terms were better defined, and there were some legalities put in, such as protecting the Association from agreements that could harm it, or officers. And we shortened the incredibly long election process.

In later Board meetings, we noted that Board minutes are now online, and so is a section on Bylaws and Ad Hoc procedures by which the organization runs.

### **Bursaries for Journalists from Developing Countries to Honor Nigel Hey**

The Executive Board of the International Science Writers Association (ISWA) established four bursaries in memory of Nigel Hey (two for each of the next two years) supporting the membership of four science journalists from developing countries. These went to Parviz Tariki of Iran and Omar Kakil of Iraq.

### **New Members Since the Last Newsletter**

**Vera Novais** is a general science writer for the Portuguese publication *Observador*, based out of Lisbon. Her various outlets and contact points are: Twitter: <https://twitter.com/VNOVAIS> , Website: <http://vnovais-observador.tumblr.com/> , LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/vnovais/> , Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/novais.vera> .

**Tania Cleopatra Orbe Martínez** is a news correspondent in Ecuador for the English science and development network SciDev.Net. She writes also for the digital magazine *Plan V* and the website [Latinamericanscience.org](http://Latinamericanscience.org). Orbe is a Professor of journalism at the universities of San Francisco de Quito and the Americas. Ms. Orbe edits magazines, books and digital content and is a lecturer in workshops on communication and scientific outreach. In 2014 she won the First Hack of Science Journalism in Mexico. In 2008, Orbe created the scientific dissemination magazine *E-Ciencia*, for the University of the Armed Forces (ESPE), which is still in circulation.

Ms. Orbe has a diploma and a master's degree in Public Communication of Science and Technology. She has worked as a research writer, health news, society and economy in the newspaper *Expreso* and *Vanguardia* magazine, which she helped to create in 2005.

Reach her at Email: [taniaorbe@gmail.com](mailto:taniaorbe@gmail.com), LinkedIn: Tania Orbe , Twitter: @taniaorbe , and on Facebook: Tania Orbe .  **N. I**

## **The Status of Science Journalism in Iran**

*Parviz Tarikhi*

### **Introduction and Background**

Science in Iran has been highly valued since ancient times, a factor that continued into the Islamic epoch and that has persisted into the contemporary era. Because of this long tradi-



Maryam Amid, known as Mozayyan ol-Saltaneh was the first Iranian female journalist who published the 8-page weekly newsletter entitled Danesh (means 'Science' in the Persian language) in 1910 for one year. In 1913 she started publishing the biweekly newsletter Shokoufeh ('Blossom' in Persian ) until 1919 that stopped after 77 issues because of her early death.

tion, science has been respected both by the people and their rulers. However, the participation of most Iranians in modern science is still limited. For example, there is a difference between traditional knowledge and the modern scientific method, and many people still have many ambiguous concepts about science and scientists. To advance social and economic development, Iranians, like all peoples, need to recognize the potential contributions by the scientific and technical sectors.

Science journalism can provide an understanding of this connection. The roots of contemporary science journalism in Iran stretch back to the country's first news media. Scientific news and articles can be found in the very earliest newspapers. Although most were imprecise translations of scientific papers from un-credited sources, others were original stories written by journalists. Among them was reportage of celestial events, such as the appearance of comets, the fall of meteorites, or the occasional eclipse, as well as notes on other spectacular or unusual natural phenomena from around the globe.

Newspapers also published regular reports about the first groups of Iranian students who were dispatched to Europe with government support to study modern sciences and bring the knowledge back home. This

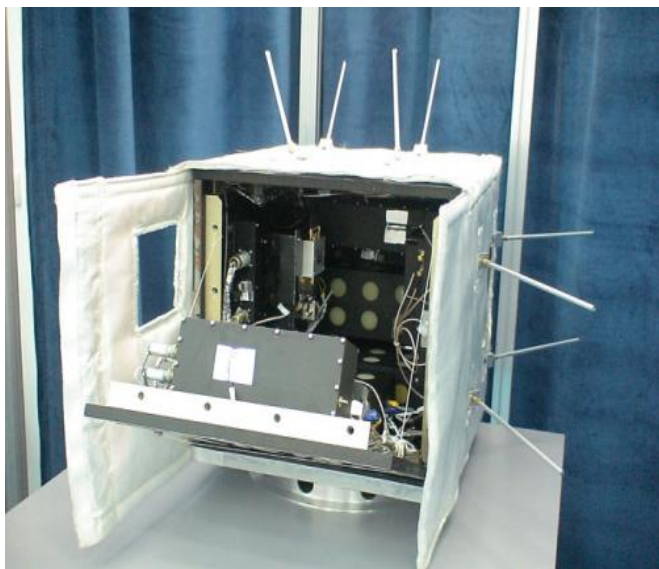
was an era that saw the first establishment of modern social, political, and economic organizations, developments that created an atmosphere which eventually helped foster the 1907 Iranian Constitutional Revolution. Since that time, the Iranian news media has experienced many fluctuations, with brief periods of press freedom interspersed with periods of limitations, restrictions and "red-lines."



### Journalistic Issues in Iran

In their research paper, “The Challenges and Limitations for the Development of Science Journalism in Iran,” published [in Persian] in the Summer 2015 issue of *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities*, an Iranian scientific-research quarterly, M. Broojerdi-e Alavi and F. Bonyadi categorize the challenges of science writing and journalism in Iran into three groups: (I) the challenges which are common to science, (II) the challenges which are common to journalism in general, and (III) the challenges specific to the sub-genre of science journalism.

The authors argue that for Group I the reluctance of Iranian scientists to cooperate with or contribute to the media is a key factor. The reason is that science in Iran is considered as an elitist entity, with scientific activity traditionally reserved for educated elites, who are considered “superior” to the general populace. Moreover, Iranian science is considered a “non-



A view of the Omid satellite in the lab which is the first homemade Iranian satellite launched into space onboard of a domestic launcher on February 2, 2009.

colloquial entity” with a one-directional relationship with the community, i.e., from top down. The other reason scientists are reluctant to contribute to media is that such efforts are considered a form of populism, demeaning their status as elites. Another major factor is the scarce attention paid by policy-makers to basic science. Politicians like showy, spectacular results—such as Iran’s one satellite made and launched entirely in this country—and such science can be treated as additional tools for power and supremacy.

The nation’s scientific priorities are set by the politicians, becoming more and more ideological, and, consequently, the research supported politically and economically is much more likely to be covered by the media, while equally valuable but less “politically supported” research is ignored. The politicization of science leads to the reduction of criticism, since criticizing supported scientific achievements is considered as criticizing the sources of support. This in turn further encourages the government sector to develop its own, preferred scientific goals at the expense of activities in the academic sector. Since the

#### The ISWA Board

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Treasurer: Vacant

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Webmaster: Dr. Sedeer el-Showk [webmaster@internationalsciencewriters.org](mailto:webmaster@internationalsciencewriters.org)

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government sector often sees security aspects in relation to its scientific achievements, it may limit journalists' access to information—even about major research that might benefit society.

For Group II, those challenges facing journalism in general, the main factor is again the politics-centered nature of the country, where everything is seen from a political point of view. Journalism becomes not so much a goal in itself but a means for attaining material benefits, fame, fortune, and influence within the political arena. Obviously, such an attitude leads to a decline in journalism. It is no wonder journalists often lack the trust of not only scientists but also their intended audiences.

The last group of challenges (III) include those specific to the sub-genre of science journalism. “Scientific translation” is often taken to be the same as scientific journalism, a major problem for it implies that journalists need merely reproduce the scientists’ findings in simplified forms. Moreover, the perceived image of the “exalted scientist” in Iranian popular culture causes the science journalist to feel as an inferior. As a result, it is often difficult for a science journalist to criticize a scientist, even if the journalist is a scientist himself. On the other hand, developing close personal relationships with scientists can lead to ignoring or underplaying scientific controversies, thus denying society its right to accurate reporting and rightful criticism. Indeed, the poor relationship between science journalists and the society is one of the great challenges in this domain. The journalist who does not know his audience well will often produce content that has no relevance to that audience—and will not allow the audience to make valid connections between a scientific concept and its source.




The front page of issue 39 of the newspaper Vaghaye-e Etefagh-yeh which was first published on January 8, 1851 by Mirza Taghi Khan-e Farahani (1807-1852) one of Iran's greatest reformist statesmen, better known as Amir Kabir. There are reports in the newspaper of the Dar ol-Fonoon Academy of Learning (or simply the Dar ol-Fonoon, standing for polytechnic in the Persian language) for producing hydrogen gas in order to carry balloons aloft. Dar ol-Fonoon was Iran's first academy of education and training to be established in the Western Europe style. It was founded in 1849 by Amir Kabir.

## **How Many Science Journalists, Where, What?**

Still, despite the aforementioned issues, the Iranian mainstream media is beginning to realize the importance of science journalism, and a new generation of talented and passionate science reporters is rising. Science journalism as an important field within modern journalism is still very young in Iran, and is increasingly recognized as essential for development of the country. Still, like anywhere else in the world, it must fight harder to prove its importance to decision-makers, i.e., the managers and editors of mass media.

But there are many opportunities, too. Iran has a very young population and most of the youth is interested in science and technological advancements, and they are very good at using modern technology. It is notable that Iranian youth were among the first groups in the world to use social networks as a tool for citizen journalism and to use cyber-space to organize political and social movements, such as the Green Movement following the controversial 2009 presidential election.

*Daneshmand* ('The Scientist' in Persian), *Yekan* ('Ones') were two popular science Persian-language magazines with considerable readership and great circulations in the years before the 1979 Revolution. *Danestani-ha* ('Knowable Things') is another periodical, which began publication immediately after the Revolution. Since then, many new science magazines with both broad and/or specialized audiences have been launched to meet many different interests--such as astronomy, space, technology, natural sciences, computer, electronics, automobiles, medicine, biology, hygiene, sociology, history, and culture. At the same time, science and technology pages appeared in more and more daily newspapers. In addition, the mainstream broadcast media has shown some interest in science and technology. State TV and Radio produced more science shows as part of their general programming, and *IRIB 4* (Channel 4 on Iranian State TV) was founded with the specific purpose of airing scientific and cultural programs.

The increasing number of popular science publications and media reflects the enthusiasm of Iranian citizens in these subjects. More importantly, this enthusiasm has transcended political borders and there are a number of Iranian science writers and journalists who publish their work in articles, papers, and books internationally. Their themes cover both internal Iranian issues as well as topics of more global interest. Indeed, the on-line availability of quality science journalism seems an easy and effective way to overcome the challenges that science writing and journalism faces in Iran.  **NI**



*Dr. Parviz Tarikhi, physicist and space remote sensing specialist, is a long time member of ISWA and writer on space and astronomy. A second edition of his book, "The Iranian Space Endeavor: Ambitions and Reality," published by Springer/Praxis in 2014, focused exclusively on the Iranian space program, is presently in preparation and should be available to interested readers worldwide soon. He is also one of this year's recipients of the Nigel Hey Bursary prize from ISWA.*



## **Overused North America, Underrated South**

*Wolfgang Goede*



In the valley of Medellín, cable cars have revolutionized public transportation. The technology is being copied in urban regions throughout the world © Goede

I had just returned to Colombia, where I spend a few months every year. Apart from engaging in our mountain hostel (<http://hostallafinca.com>) and social projects, I work journalistically. I grabbed the first *Semana*, the weekly news magazine, available to update myself on Colombian science and technology. It carried two promising stories, one about the mystery of why the brains of some old people remain juvenile, the other one about the ten-year anniversary of the iPhone and the next generation to come.

Yet...how disappointing! The first one rehashed common wisdom that if you remain curious and intellectually active, your brains are being exercised like a muscle and remain strong. Everyone who wants to find out about the miracles of iPhone 8, 9, 10 learns: Apple won't tell – of course, colleagues—but you should have found ways to investigate, otherwise you wrote your story for the bin. Sorry!

The criticism applies to all of us. The brain story had a scientific source, the Massachusetts General Hospital, but not everything which comes out of the scientific pipeline is worthy to report. High-tech gadgets like iPhones are tempting, like cars, because they attract large audiences, but very seldom they are cutting-edge. We need to find the real stories behind



these stories or other, better stories.

In addition to this, in many parts of Latin America (and also other regions) science journalists rely too much on US America and Europe as sources. The North is used too much while the South is underutilized, which has to do a lot with colonial history and traditions. But isn't the South just as rich in nature, science and technology? Let's take Colombia, as an example.

It's the country with the largest biodiversity in the world, with thousands of plants having medical properties in the still-untouched Amazon basin. They are a hope for millions of cancer patients and can effectively tackle tropical diseases which, like Zika, are also threatening the North. The German Max Planck Society established scientific cooperatives with Colombian universities to develop a new generation of pharmaceutical weapons against diseases of civilization.

Or take Medellín: not the cocaine capital any more, but one of the most innovative cities of the world, with a new highly advanced public transportation system relying on a metro with cable cars and a state-of-the-art tramway. And who has heard about Colombia's Airbols, artificial trees, which effectively clean the air and are being exported as an effective tool against contamination throughout the world? (If you hadn't heard, check this article out in the local newspaper *El Colombiano* [here](#).)

In a world haunted by conflicts and terrorism, Colombia has become a hope. Major universities founded a peace institute to monitor the new Colombian peace treaty and its implementation with the FARC guerillas. Much about de-escalation of conflicts can be learned of this, for use in other regions of the world – but it needs to be reported, scientifically straight and evaluated, by us, science journalists.

I could add many more topics, i.e. the fact that Colombia counts 62 indigenous tribes, each one with its own language, but with very little known about their habits, traditions, crafts. So, come to Colombia, come to Latin America, and chip in to report the natural, technical and scientific wonders of the Americas. It's a niche, underrated so far, with lots of space for many of us. Needless to say, it helps if you put into your travel gear a bit of pioneering spirit and entrepreneurship. ✍️NI



*Wolfgang Chr. Goede, ISWA board member 2015/2016, is an international science journalist and lives in Munich and Medellín. For more about science and technology in Colombia, see also his publication [The Pacific Puma](#) in the Serbian science magazine [Elements](#), published in Serbian, with the English version in the newsletter of the German-Colombian Friends [http://www.dkfev.de/downloads/KA\\_Archiv/ka\\_101\\_plus.pdf](http://www.dkfev.de/downloads/KA_Archiv/ka_101_plus.pdf).*

### **WANTED! STORIES!**

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## We Are Here...No Longer

Vasiliki Michopoulou

The 8th February 2017 front page, seen in the picture here, could have been the last edition of the oldest Greek newspaper *TA NEA*. It was headlined "*We are here*", meaning that the paper's journalists plan to continue their fight to publish news. The newspaper, which belongs to the oldest traditional publishing company in Greece, DOL, was also the first to publish science articles and magazines in Greece. Unfortunately, though, with a history of 96 years putting it amongst the oldest publishing companies in Europe, the paper was shut down. The excuses included excessive loans, up to 180 million euros, and no investors to support it.

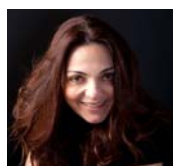


Since the beginning of the fiscal crisis in 2010, the publishing market in Greece has shrunk dramatically. Many major publishing groups have been in jeopardy from financial difficulties, including the two historic newspapers, the daily *TA NEA* and the Sunday newspaper *TO BHMA*, also owned by DOL Group. These historical newspapers announced their coming suspension in January through an article "*Who strangles the press?*" Blaming four Greek banks—Alpha Bank, National Bank, Piraeus Bank and Eurobank—the article's author stressed that "the creditor banks decided to freeze the accounts of the Group and therefore revenues from newspaper sales and commercial advertising." Accusing the banks, the government and the opposition parties, the article stressed that the closure of these newspapers will not only put 500 people into unemployment but also will bring the collapse of Greek democracy. *TA NEA* and *TO BHMA* have played a dominant role in Greek politics since their founding, in 1922 and 1931, respectively. The newspapers fought, even under war and dictatorship, for an advanced, liberal, progressive Greece.

Journalists posted on social media their willingness to continue to publish in the newspaper—as long as there was an expectation that banks would release accounts to pay current obligations such as payroll (the delay has surpassed five months), paper, printing etc. A court decided that a bank account should remain open in order to cover the operational costs of the newspapers, site operations, and the Group's radio, as well as part of the salaries. In early April the court agreed to a bank request for a special liquidation, and DOL entered a new phase of uncertainty.

The DOL case also has a bitter political flavor. The newspapers and the radio have been the sharpest opponents of Greek populists. They were styled by the ruling parties as enemies and treated accordingly. When a power-critical voice is silenced, that is a blow to democracy.

Addendum: Recently, another big traditional publishing company, "Pegasus," with four newspapers (among them, my employer, *Imerisia*), plus magazines and websites, faced the same problem. There are 450 people unpaid for six months and who, at this writing, are on strike. But recently there are rumors about an investor. Stay tuned. ✍️ **NI**



*Vaso Michopoulou is a Member-at-Large on the ISWA Board, a journalist on TV and in print in Greece, and a speakers liaison for the Athens Science Festival.*

## Recent Books by ISWA Members

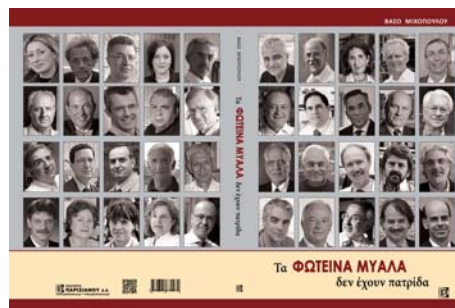
*Τα φωτεινά μυαλά δεν έχουν πατρίδα*  
*The bright minds have no homeland* (Translation)

**Vasiliki (Vaso) Michopoulou**

Parisianou: 960-583-147-9

22,00 Euros

“Scientists of the 21st century: life stories inside labs” could be the alternative title of the new book written by the Greek biologist and journalist Vaso Michopoulou. The writer tries to introduce to the public 40 Greek and foreign leading scientists, who have shaped and continue to shape the conditions of the reality of the modern scientific world, to take mankind a step ahead and to affect our lives. How and why they have chosen their way, what attracts them to the science that they are working on, and what are the results of their research, what emotions they experience after a scientific finding, do they have lives outside the laboratory? These are questions that these distinguish personalities try to answer in a simple way in this book. In Greek.



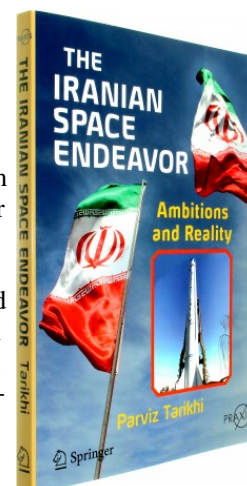
*The Iranian Space Endeavor: Ambitions and Reality*

**Dr. Parviz Tarikhi**

Springer Praxis Books: 978-3-319-05346-2

eBook: 23,79 Euros, \$35.04, softcover: 29,99 Euros/\$

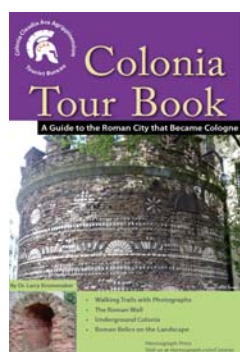
For those who see the trend of progress and movement of the Iranian space endeavor from the outside, it can be difficult to understand what goes on behind the scenes. However, for one who observes these events firsthand, they take on a very different meaning. In this book, the author brings new and different profiles of Iran’s space endeavor to light. Iran claims to be the ninth leading country in the world capable of manufacturing satellites and launching them, plans to land an astronaut on the Moon within a decade, and says its own president plans to be the first Iranian astronaut to travel into space. The author explains in this book that not all of these claims are quite as they seem. In addition to technical explanations, the book also includes historical, legal, social and cultural aspects of Iran’s space program as well. It is the author’s goal to create a tangible feeling of Iran’s space endeavor for the readers.



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*The Colonia Tour Book, A Guide to the Roman City That Became Cologne*

**Dr. Larry Krumenaker**

Hermograph Press, \$15.99; 14,99 Euros

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