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REORGANISATION AND EMPHASIS OF EUROPEAN ENLARGEMENT ON ECONOMIC UNION

As its founding principles and fundamental values state, the European Union is open to any country in the European geographical area provided that certain basic social and economic criteria are met, guaranteeing democracy and the rule of law. Since it was created in the 1950s, the Union has been significantly enlarged and today it is an entity that encompasses the greater part of the territory of Europe.

In 1981, Greece took its place on the map of the EU. The accession of increasing numbers of states over the following decades has shaped a significant European family, in a pioneering venture which is one of a kind. As a young Greek citizen I am a member of a group based on shared principles and democratic processes; these processes are open to society and focused on listening to the desires of the people. The strategic policy of enlargement has multiplied the opportunities available to me, with the very swift development of cross-border co-operation at every level.

First and foremost, the mobility of human resources for work and/or academic purposes within the EU has made it particularly accessible, creating increased employment prospects within a single market. The constant increase in the number of Member States means I have the opportunity to take advantage of the benefits of a common market with free movement of goods and ideas. Despite some problems, this market promotes outward-looking and multi-cultural activity by individuals and organisations. For instance, as a student, I have the opportunity to take part in student exchange mobility programmes subsidised by the EU (for example through Erasmus+) and to live abroad, finding out about the host country's culture and social fabric first hand. Mobility is promoted at many levels, so that it ends up forming the basis of my daily life, and my future activities are not confined within the narrow bounds of national borders. I am constantly given theoretical and practical knowledge, and I have the opportunity to learn foreign languages and to become particularly flexible so that I can adjust to both the European and the global society of the future. As a person, I am now in a position to break away from old inward-looking and claustrophobic ways of being. I am a member of a multi-coloured whole and I recognise the beauty of a democratic European Union, a mosaic of different cultures of equal value which reinforces justice and the defence of human rights.

The enlargement process must always be pursued with the objective of consolidating economic well-being and improving institutions as a whole. The accession of new members has benefited the Greek economy, offering new advantages for the development of healthy, outward-looking businesses, the improvement of competitiveness and, as a result, job creation. My experience in European society has taught me how the removal of barriers and the customs union within the EU promotes trade, creates a positive outlook, and – provided that it is put to good use – mobilises an economy's domestic resources, making a significant contribution to the progress of regions and states. Of course, today Europe is being tested as it has not been since it was founded, with



Greece finding itself at the centre of recession, in an extended period of under-development which raises serious questions about the prospect of enlargement and makes future progress difficult.

The challenges to be faced are of crucial importance, and it has now become an urgent necessity to resolve serious issues such as persistent unemployment and the disintegration of the social fabric within Member States. The focus is on those countries which lag behind other states, and there are doubts as to how far the incorporation of further countries can make a positive contribution to the essential reorganisation of the European Union. It is proposed that the applicant countries should be more pre-prepared for their accession, with the promotion of deeper reforms and institutional modernisation before they officially join the Union. This will mean gaining valuable ground and reducing the gap between them and the countries that are already developed. A thorough review of the EU could potentially create overall benefits, but the fundamental guiding principle for attaining economic sustainability is the adoption of more meaningful measures to achieve political cohesion.

Problems that derive from mistakes of the past are fundamentally due to the inability to achieve convergence within the EU and the creation of a 'two-speed' Europe. Economic integration of the market between European regions gave rise to a difficult state of affairs, creating particular differences and discrepancies. Perhaps a renewed, modernised and locally focused regional policy will guide the EU towards various positive interactions, improving its image and re-establishing lost trust and confidence among its citizens. The time has come for the regional inequalities that have for so long plagued European society to be brought into the spotlight and kept there, for additional resources to be channelled towards the Convergence objective and for social injustices to be put right. The developmental gap distorts the nature and form of the Union as a whole, making it difficult to take advantage of the potential benefits flowing from a unified market and reinforcing internal political differences. In conclusion, enlargement of the EU has the potential to create a new map of Europe with developmental prospects, provided that it is appropriately combined with a full upgrading of regional policy as the fundamental structural policy that will support and assist countries in tackling their economic shortcomings in a holistic and sustainable way.