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LETTER TO THE EUROPEAN UNION. AN EXPANDED COUPLET.

Dear Europe,

The road that has brought me to Rome from my small and beautiful home town of Matera, in southern Italy, has unexpectedly been full of life experiences and encounters. In most cases, the credit for these lies with you, because of the financial support you provide for thousands of young people to study.

I live in a student residence with my roommate, a girl from Montenegro. My best friend is Persian and his roommate is Turkish. Other rooms along my corridor are occupied by Serbians, Albanians and Bosnians.

The initial impact was strange: because of my provincial background, I wasn't used to mixing with people from these countries; if I thought of them at all, I imagined them as 'outsiders'. The Spanish or French people I met felt familiar, almost like cousins. Now my 'family' revolves around two countries that are trying to join the European Union, countries whose citizens may one day feel as familiar to us as Germans do today.

Onur, the Turkish guy, plays jazz guitar. He came to Italy for the first time thanks to the Erasmus programme, he fell in love with Rome and decided to try and make it his home. He packed his bags and, together with his young wife, he moved to the Eternal City and enrolled at the Italian Conservatoire. He's been here for three years and already knows all the streets and monuments of Rome like the back of his hand. We all use him as our navigator. The one problem, however, is that his wife had to return to Turkey because of problems with the embassy. She will try to make it back to Italy next year but in the meantime they won't be able to see each other for 12 months. Furthermore, once they have both completed their university courses, it will be very hard for them to stay in Rome without any problems.

Lea, the girl from Montenegro, is a mother. She left Montenegro and her 10-year-old daughter to study and try to build a future for them both here in Europe. She and I are so similar: we like the same books, the same cartoons, the same food, we share ideas about the world and the reasons for our existence on earth. She is a fashion expert, for Christmas she bought her daughter the Frozen princess dress from the Disney Store on Via del Corso. She says she has an Italian soul, in fact she has learnt the language very well in just a few months. She dreams of living in a trullo, like the ones in Alberobello. The problem is that she has to renew her study visa every five months, as a result of which she missed out on being an extra in the film 'Ben Hur'.

In my house, the European Union has already expanded. People pass through it, we talk about things and inevitably discover that we are the same. Young people, especially students, are



constantly knocking down barriers and building a wider world where there's room for everyone, where we all understand one another and share the same "homeland", because we all share the same history, the same way of thinking.

The European Union is the biggest economy in the world but it's also a (if not THE) most prosperous cultural, social, legal, political (democratic and representative) and, let's face it, fairest, centre in the world. Modern revolutions united its western part; contemporary history and the Cold War only temporarily suspended and froze its eastern part, where the ice has now melted: the sun shines on the crystal clear waters of the Balkans while, inland, radios play music and people dream of becoming European, not only in geographical terms.