

***Panos Carvounis, Head of the Representation  
of the European Commission in Greece***

Dear Friends,

Generations often characterise themselves by defining events, be it on a global or a national level: “we are the generation of the war” people say, “the generation of the dictatorship”, “of the resistance”, “of the post-dictatorship era”, “the flower power generation”, “the generation that walked on the moon”... However, there is something several generations could be proud of, from 1950 onwards, something they often neglect, taking it for granted: that they are all “generations of European peace”, thanks to the United Europe in its successive forms.

The album that you have in your hands covers four of these decades of peace —four decades during which Greece linked its itinerary with that of Europe and I personally linked my life and my career with this relationship. I experienced the ups-and-downs of this relationship from the very first moment: initially in the field of policy-making, working in Directorates responsible for Energy, Transport and Entrepreneurship, then, from 2000 onwards, in the area of Communication, where I served as Director General, and finally, as Head of the Representation of the European Commission in Greece since 2010.

This joint journey between Greece and the European Union has been channelled, to a significant degree, through the Representation of the European Commission in Greece, to the 40th anniversary of which is dedicated this album: preparation for the accession (1976-1981), first decade of adaptation (1981-1991), assimilation of European roles and the euro (1991-2001), a decade of European “regularity” albeit with problems (2001-2011) up to what became known as the crisis years and of joint efforts to find a solution (2011-2016). Throughout this history the Representation was a key link and a conduit of uninterrupted, two-way communication.

But why has Greece joined the European Union? What did the initiators of this idea expect? I believe that the overriding driver was a need to consolidate democracy and ensure peace and security in a country whose fate was to be in a “hot” neighbourhood, and secondly, the desire to see this country grow, prosper and stand on its own feet. Having myself experienced dictatorship as a child, I followed closely the beginning and the evolution of what would be a long period of democratic normality, thanks largely to the Union. We had the opportunity to fully grasp the importance of this framework of peace and security in the early 90s when, while our neighbourhood was on fire, we remained protected within the European family. Regarding growth, we enjoyed it fully, but without balance. In fact the financial crisis has highlighted the distortions of a somehow superficial prosperity. Having received for many years huge benefits from our participation in the EU, we neglected to build a truly modern European state, with the structures and the obligations it entails. Instead of structuring a competitive economy, built on our comparative advantages, with the large amounts of European funds injected in our country, we had often recourse to excessive borrowing, importing products and services we had stopped to produce. We heard the song of Sirens but, unlike Ulysses, we never really reached Ithaca. Europe, however, our Union never abandoned us. I hope that browsing this album you will realise that the European Union has supported Greece uninterruptedly for more than four decades. It's not that Europe, and, more importantly, the Union have always been successful in managing situations. However,

through crises Europe learned, evolved, has been shielded; and in tandem so was Greece. And our common story continues...

Nevertheless, I could not end this preamble without focusing on the people —those who linked their careers and lives with the evolving relationship between the European Union and Greece- from European Commissioners to the “lowest” in hierarchy members of the staff. Their stories and memories have given life to this album. Most of them are Greeks whilst being European officials. It would not be an exaggeration to say that for them the common history between the Union and Greece is their life's work. When times were good, they were the first recipients of gratitude and enthusiasm —and when times were hard, they again first heard the criticisms and fought hard to preserve the ties intact and to keep the boat afloat. This album is not only about the history of Europe and Greece; it is the life of people who struggled, and still do, for their country to reap the best and ripest fruits of this relationship.

Happy reading!