

The United States of Europe is a
Fine Ideal

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INTRODUCTION

So you must be wondering what's with all the words on the front cover when you have not even started reading this thesis. Well they are defiantly not random! Stated words in blue¹ have all something to do with the European Union and more specifically with its qualities and the features of each country-member. Unity, peace, rights are some of them, but do these apply to all of the members? Consequently, I am going to delve into² whether all Union member states have equal rights and responsibilities towards the European Union, and whether the members' rights, common policies and goals are met. But first of all, let us take a closer look at the history of the European Union. How, when and why was it formed, what does the Union stand for and so forth.

HISTORY

The European Union is a geo-political entity covering a large portion of the European continent. It has been founded through the years upon numerous treaties and has undergone expansions that have taken it from 6 member states to 28, the majority of nations in Europe. It started in 1957 as the European Economic Community (EEC) and has created a common economic area with Europe-wide laws, allowing people to move and trade in other EU countries as effortlessly as they do in their own. Nineteen of these countries also share the same currency: the EURO.

The Treaty of Lisbon is the most recent treaty that dictates how the Union is run. Every member state signed to state that they each agree with what it says. Most importantly, it says which jobs ("powers") the Union should do for the members and which jobs they should do themselves. The members decide how the Union should act by voting for or against proposals.

Indeed, the objective of the EU is to bring its member states closer together with respect of human rights and democracy. The Union meets its target utilizing a common style of passport, common rules about fair trading between its member states,

¹ <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/thesaurus-category/british/the-european-union>

² George Davidson (2004). *Roget's Thesaurus*. Penguin Reference

common agreements about law enforcement, and other similar agreements. Most members share the common currency (the Euro) and most allow people to travel from one country to another without having to show a passport.

Examining how the Union was formed through the years, one goes back to after World War II, when the countries in Europe wanted to live peacefully together and help one another's economies. Instead of fighting for coal and steel, the first member countries (West), namely Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg, created one European Coal and Steel Community in 1952.

In 1957 in the Italian city of Rome, the member countries signed a new treaty and formed the European Economic Community. Now it was a community for coal, steel and for trade. Later on, the name was changed to become the European Community.

In 1993, with the Treaty of Maastricht, it again changed its name to the European Union. Under the new Treaty, the member countries work together not only in politics and economy (coal, steel and trade), but also in commerce (money), justice (laws), and foreign affairs. Additionally, with the Schengen Agreement, 22 member countries of the EU opened their borders to each other, so people can travel from one country to the other without a passport or an identity card. By then, 16 member countries had already replaced their national currencies with the Euro. 10 new countries became members of the EU in 2004, 2 more became members in 2007, and 1 more in 2013.

In a tabular form currently the European Union comprises the following member states:

Germany	Ireland	Sweden	Malta
Belgium	Denmark	Cyprus	Poland
France	Greece	Czech Republic	Slovakia
Italy	Spain	Estonia	Slovenia
Luxemburg	Portugal	Hungary	Romania
Netherlands	Austria	Latvia	Bulgaria
United Kingdom	Finland	Lithuania	Croatia

The declared³ member-states share vast advantages, but I could not say that they are short of disadvantages either. Initially, EU citizens are free to move from one member country to another. They can freely travel, study, work, or live in any European country of their choice. As a result and over the years, 3.5 million of new jobs, more or less, have been created. With these expansions, many economically deprived regions have developed dramatically. When it comes to education, the opportunities available to each EU citizen have exploded allowing access to vast sources of knowledge. Furthermore, each member-state nation has acquired a “louder voice”. The EU is able to ensure that all members’ concerns are taken seriously and heard internationally, since it speaks on behalf of millions of people. Therefore, given that member countries of the EU are entitled to such benefits, it can be stated that it is truly an advantage to be part of the European Union.

Yet, if there are benefits to being a member of the EU, there are disadvantages, too. Being a member of the EU is pricey. Different sources claim that the cost per head ranges from £300 to £900. Besides that, the ‘single currency’ poses a great problem.

³ George Davidson (2004). *Roget’s Thesaurus*. Penguin Reference

Not all member countries are using the Euro though the EU and, as its use is emphasized, that generates economic inequalities. Also, not all policies are efficient; a good example is that of the Common Agricultural Policy, which resulted to oversupply and higher prices of agricultural goods. Finally, overcrowding is another by-product of the Union. It was mentioned earlier that the citizens of member countries are free to move from one place to another; this has led to overcrowding and has increased prices of housing, as well as everyday traffic congestions.

QUESTIONNAIRE & STATISTICS

At this point, I would like to refer to the questionnaire used for my thesis. My questionnaire focuses only on Greece and how some of its citizens perceive the local economic situation in relation to the country's participation in the European Union. For the feasibility of the survey, about 60 people were asked the following questions:

Questions	YES	No opinion	NO
Do you think that Greece caused its own problems?		×	
Do you think that Greece is being treated unfairly from the EEC, in contrast to the other countries of the EU?	×		
Do you believe that Greece should cease being a member of the EU and return to Drachma?			×
Would you agree that Greece did not fulfil the criteria for successful membership of a currency union with the rest of Europe?	×		

Here are my personal answers to the questionnaire:

- ✓ Do you think that Greece caused its own problems?

My judgment is that in order to be positive or negative about something so specific, you should know everything that this country has offered, as well as the mistakes made by the Greek political and economic regime throughout the years. Due to lack of thorough knowledge, I would have to say that I have no opinion on this question.

✓ Do you think that Greece is being treated unfairly from the European Economic Community (EEC), in contrast to the other countries of the EU?

I strongly believe that Yes Greece is being treated unfairly from the EEC in contrast to other countries of the EU, which managed to overcome their economic problems with the support and help of the EEC. When it comes to Greece, it seems difficult to find the right way to tackle the problems at hand and provide real help towards a permanent resolution of the economic Greek crisis.

✓ Do you believe that Greece should cease being a member of the EU and return to Drachma?

Definitely not, if something like that happens and Greece returns to Drachma, on the one hand yes as a country it would have the chance to start from scratch and possibly re-build the economy, but on the other hand it would go bankrupt. The imports and exports of the country would be diminished and finally its entire integrity would be in danger.

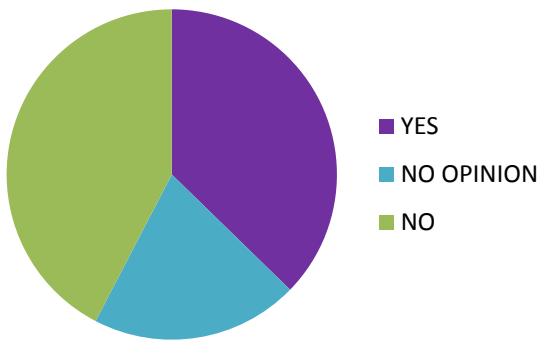
✓ Would you agree that Greece did not fulfil the criteria for successful membership of a currency union with the rest of Europe?

I would like to answer this question as the Ex-Finance Minister answered it when he was asked by Mark Taylor, University of Warwick⁴ “Now, if by “criteria” you meant the Maastricht limits, it is of course clear that Greece did not fulfil them. But then again nor did Italy or Belgium. Conversely, Spain and Ireland did meet the criteria and, indeed, by 2007 the Madrid

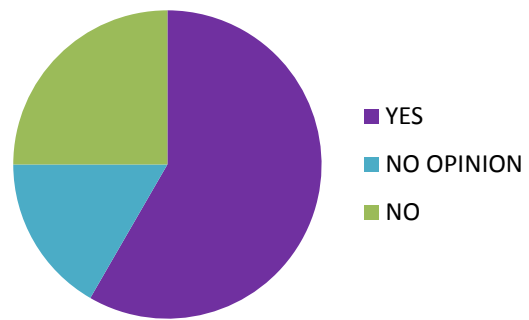
⁴ <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/08/yanis-varoufakis-greece-eu/402580/>

and Dublin governments were registering deficit, debt, and inflation numbers that, according to the official criteria, were better than Germany's. And yet when the crisis hit, Spain and Ireland sank into the mire. In short, the euro zone was badly designed for everyone. Not just for Greece!"

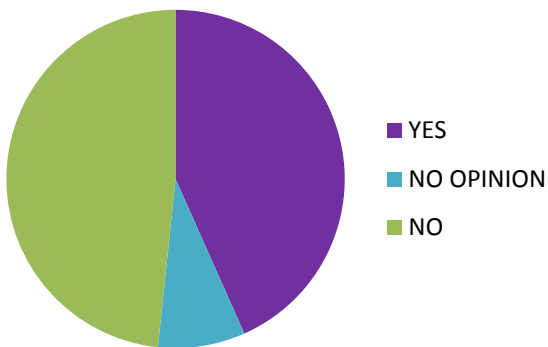
1st Question



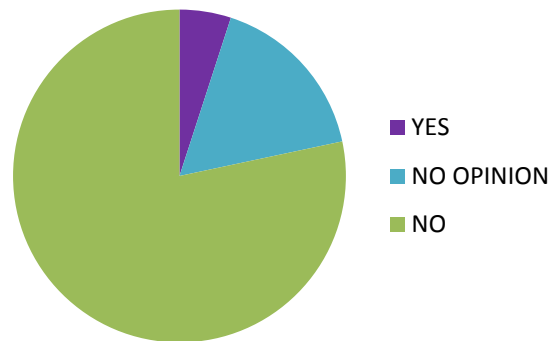
2nd Question



3rd Question



4th Question



RESULTS

So as depicted by the statistics above, on the 1st Question the answer NO outweighed YES by just a few people. Approximately everyone belonging to the age groups of 13-25 and 26-45 answered NO or NO OPINION and that because of age; being young the population belonging to these groups had no judgement on what had happened the former years, whereas the older ones had a better insight into the specific topic. Regarding the 2nd Question, it was clear from the beginning that the answer would be YES. Everyone answered this question with certainty,

especially the younger ones, who seem to be extremely disappointed with the economy of the country and the “help” that we get from Germany. Now as far as the third Question is concerned, a huge controversy arose. The answer was representative of each person’s attitude on the topic and basically split in half as this was actually the topic of the referendum that took place on July 5th, 2015 in Greece. Finally the last question challenged all age groups. After a lot of thought, almost all answered NO. They supported their answer by referring to the criteria of the Maastricht agreement which were not actually met, not only by Greece but by many more member states.

RECOMMENDATION

First of all, I believe that a proposal to the Council should be made to foresee that all jobseekers, who have been out of work for more than 12 months in a row, receive an individual assessment of their skills and capabilities and a job integration agreement, offering them a concrete and personalised plan back to work, before reaching 18 months of unemployment. That would prove really beneficial for the severely economically affected countries of the EU south, such as Spain and Greece, where unemployment rates soar. I would also recommend that the more advanced countries of the Union help the weaker ones when needed, in an effort to re-establish true equality of all EU state members, against the mere enforcement of the German or the French point of view.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, I firmly believe that at this point the EU does not represent equally the best interests of all Union countries, but favours the ones that have the power to influence others. If the above recommendations are taken into consideration, I am

positive that the European Union will be dramatically improved into a better entity.

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