

*“The United States of Europe is a fine ideal”*

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## **1. Introduction:**

*Peace: Freedom from war and violence, especially when people live and work together happily without disagreements.*

After the end of the Second World War, with the unprecedented losses and disasters it caused, the European governments could envisage nothing less but living peacefully. On Robert Schuman's initiative and in collaboration with Jean Monnet, the first European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was founded in 1950 with the Treaty of Paris which was signed by Belgium, France, West Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Italy. With the passage of time, ECSC has developed changing its name and general cause upon many occasions, until 1992. Then, with the Maastricht Treaty it is officially renamed the European Union (EU), widening its activities and vision. Through a series of numerous achievements, treaties and successes, the European Union came to be considered by many as an area of progress, prosperity and democracy. The EU today counts 28 member-states.

However, one could say that the image of the European Union today is not consistent with its initial vision and characteristics. Conflicts between the member-states, the dramatic increase in unemployment, the terrorist attacks and the unfair distribution of refugees coming from the east, are some of the current burning problems which demonstrate that the image of the United Europe has fallen apart.

As can be expected, due to all the current affairs that preoccupy its citizens every day, the European Union has been affected as far as it concerns both the practical issues and the values and ideals it has offered throughout the centuries. The lack of equal opportunities and rights between the member-states as well as the unbalanced distribution of wealth is one of the main characteristics of our era. A characteristic example of all the above is Luxembourg. Despite its small size, it is the wealthiest country of the EU and is characterized by constant development, low inflation, minimum unemployment with the per capita income estimated around 263, while the average income of EU countries is 100 (based on a Eurostat research in 2012). At the same time, with a per capita income of around 47, Bulgaria is considered as the poorest country of the European Union. One of its main problems is

that many Bulgarian citizens abandon their country in order to live a more decent life elsewhere. This example shows that the predominant situations existing have led to a lack of solidarity between the member-states. It will be difficult to maintain a balance given the current situation, and the United States of Europe is no longer a fine ideal because of the increasing amount of inequality among the member states. All member states of Europe have equal rights and responsibilities towards the EU, however these rights, common policies and goals are rarely met any more.

## **2. History:**

According to Robert Schuman (a well-known lawyer and the Foreign Affairs Minister of France for four years), a peaceful Europe was the only way European countries could guarantee prosperity and social progress, as their individual acreage is insufficient. Peace through Europe could only be accomplished with the cooperation and the federal form member countries were willing to make. With this as a main idea, Robert Schuman, thanks to his great collaboration with Jean Monnet (a Frenchman economist, political consultant and the inspiration behind the globally known “Schuman Plan”), planned the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1950 to unite Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands both economically and politically.

The “Plan’s” purpose was to reinforce the economic cooperation between these industrial European countries with the conviction that countries connected with commerce produce economic interdependence and, therefore, the will for peace. It’s noteworthy, however, to mention that the situation evinced the need of this new orientation towards European integration. The principle reasons that led to the creation of this Community prototype of the European Union were: the Europeans’ awareness of their weakness after the Second World War as the United States and the Soviet Union were the first powers in economy, politics and military, the conviction that it was required to avoid a following confrontation among European States, and the great desire for a free, fair and more wealthy continent.

Due to the success of the ECSC, the six countries expand their cooperation by signing the Treaty of Rome in 1957, establish the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC). The establishment of the EEC led to a free circulation of people, goods and services within the member-states while with the establishment of EAEC, restrictions are imposed on the use of atomic energy.

During the 60s, the European Union takes the following important steps: In 1962, it inaugurates the “common agricultural policy”. One year later, the six member-states sign the first international treaty providing economic support to the poor countries of Africa, the

Caribbean and the Pacific Ocean, with the requirement that these countries respect human rights. In 1968, the European Union abrogates custom tariffs among member-states. As a result, commercial transactions not only among the member-states but with the rest of the world began to increase amazingly.

In the early 70s, three new members are added to the European Community (EC): Denmark, the United Kingdom and Ireland (January 1st, 1973). This results in making the European Union even stronger. On December 10, 1974, the European Union establishes the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) having as a goal to transfer funds from the wealthier to the poorer regions in order to ameliorate the quality of life, attract investments and create new job positions. At the end of this decade, the first direct elections for the European Parliament are held.

January 1st, 1981, Greece becomes the 10th member of the EU with Spain and Portugal following five years later. It is important to note that during this decade three major programs are developed: the first research and development program of the EU, known as Esprit, the Erasmus program, as well as the Single European Act (SEA) which enhances the authorities of the European Parliament and strengthens the efforts made towards the environmental protection.

One of the major highlights in the history of the EU is the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 which introduces two new features: the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and the Economic and Monetary Union. The EC is officially renamed the European Union. In 1995, three new countries enter the EU: Austria, Sweden and Finland. Towards the end of the decade (January 1st, 1999) the Euro becomes the official currency and it is used only by 11 countries for commercial and financial transactions.

In 2002, Euro banknotes and coins are officially used by all member-states of the EU. A year later, military troops under EU leadership are sent to safeguard peace in the Balkans. At the same time, the member-states come to an agreement regarding the creation of a common area of liberty, security and justice for all European citizens by 2010. In 2004, eight more central and eastern European countries enter the EU. In the same year, the Treaty for the European Constitution Enactment is signed and the Kyoto protocol is put into force. In 2007 another two countries

enter the European Union and the Treaty of Lisbon is signed.

It is important to note that up to the present, the European Union has made great efforts towards stability, peace and dealing with the financial problems of several member-states. For example, the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) was established to strengthen the role of the European Central Bank and investment planning towards further development. Finally, due to the death of thousands of refugees in the Mediterranean, the European Union decided to take measures in order to better manage the refugee crisis and, consequently, to provide more effective support to the refugees.

Based on the above, we understand that throughout the past decades, by establishing rights and signing treaties, the EU has tried to fulfil and get closer to some of its goals so as to be considered an "ideal". Starting from the employment domain, the EU has managed to strengthen small businesses by creating new job positions and establishing the terms and conditions of employment. Moreover, under the Erasmus programme, many young businessmen are given the opportunity to gain business skills. Finally, the EU helps areas encountering serious work position losses. The idea of solidarity projected by the EU towards its member-states, as well as towards the whole world, is extremely important. More specifically, the EU provides instant support to the victims of areas affected by natural disasters. Apart from the support provided, the EU is responsible for the prevention and the protection of geographical areas from such disasters. Another major issue to which the EU projects its solidarity is the refugee issue. The EU is expected to provide asylum to refugees, covering their basic needs, as well as protection. Over the last years, the attention of the EU has been mainly focused on child and adolescent refugees who need special care. Another important achievement is the establishment of new laws on child protection both over the Internet and in the real world. Finally, the most important domain to which the EU has contributed is the domain of justice. It should be mentioned that it is an obligation of the member-states to provide legal services for free as their citizens have the right to a fair trial anywhere within the EU even when they do not speak the language of the adjudicated case. The information above constitutes some of the most important achievements of the EU in major domains since its foundation.

Speaking of justice in the paragraph above, it is important to mention some of the fundamental rights of the EU citizens. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union is the official document compiling all these rights which are divided into categories. The first category is about dignity. The dignity of the citizens is inviolable. It must be respected and protected. This category contains the right to life, the right to the integrity of the person, the prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the prohibition of slavery and forced labour. The second category is about freedoms, the most important being the right to liberty and the security of citizens within the member-states. In particular, it refers to the respect for family and private life, the protection of personal data, the right to marry and the right to found a family. The freedom of thought, conscience and religion is also recognized, as well as the freedom of expression and information, showing that pluralism within the EU should be respected. The right to education and the freedom to choose an occupation are also fundamental rights included in this paragraph. The third category is based on equality and more precisely on equality before the law; on non-discrimination which leads to cultural, religious and linguistic diversity; on the rights of the child as well as the rights of the elderly; and the integration of persons with disabilities. It also stresses the equality between men and women, a right dating back to 1957, with the Treaty of Rome which introduced the principle of equal pay for men and women. The fourth category of the Charter refers to solidarity underlining the right to fair and just working conditions, the prohibition of child labour and the protection of young people at work, the right to the protection of family and professional life, as well as the right to social security and social assistance. It also mentions the right to human health protection, consumer protection, and environmental protection. The next category is dedicated to citizens' rights with the most important being: the right to vote and to stand as a candidate, the right to good administration and the freedom of movement and residence. The last category refers to justice emphasizing the right of a fair trial and the right of defense. Therefore, by overviewing the main rights secured by the EU, we understand that their format is comprehensive without any omission.

### 3. Methodology/Questionnaire:

The methodology used to collect all information for this research in order to make some recommendations and reach a conclusion includes internet research about the present and the history of the EU, as well as the following questionnaire.

1. What is your gender?
    - Male
    - Female
  
  2. What is your age?
    - Up to 20
    - 21-40
    - 41-60
    - 61-80
  
  3. How would you rate the development of the European Union?
    - Positive
    - Negative
    - Neutral
  
  4. How would you rate the development of Greece after its entry in the EU?
    - Positive
    - Negative
    - Neutral
  
  5. Do you believe the European citizens' quality of life is affected by the EU?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Sometimes
  
  6. Do you believe that all member states have equal rights and responsibilities towards the EU?
    - Yes
    - No
  
  7. In your opinion, is the United States of Europe a fine ideal?
    - Yes
    - No
- Justify:

## **4. Results:**

The questionnaire was distributed to 50 Greek citizens with an average age of 35, 31 males and 19 females. The results were the following:

- 22% find the development of the EU positive, while 28% find it negative, and 50% neutral.
- 16% rated the development of Greece after its entry to the EU as positive, 68% as negative, and 16% as neutral.
- 78% of the respondents believe that European citizens' quality of life is affected by the EU, 10% that they aren't affected, while 12% answer "Sometimes".
- 98% answered that not all member states have equal rights and responsibilities while the remaining 2% answered positively.
- Finally, 98% believe that the EU is not ideal, with the predominant justification being that EU member states are not able to put into effect the ideal of this concept.

## **5. Recommendations:**

In accordance with the research on the history of the EU and the results of the questionnaire, there are to be some radical changes presented which must be made with the aim of the attainment of the European ideal. Firstly, in order to reduce social inequality in member states and to be able to pose common goals and have equal rights and responsibilities all together, the fairer distribution of natural resources must exist as well as a simultaneous control over the distribution of wealth. Through this control, it will be possible to appropriate the funds coming from the EU for the creation of job positions and, by extension, to the reduction of unemployment. But, in order for the member-states to perceive these changes, what needs to be changed is their way of thinking as well as the way citizens are informed of the burning problems that concern them. More specifically, it is absolutely necessary to cultivate a climate of solidarity among the member-states which need to operate having the common good and not the benefits of the governments as a goal. Based on the ideas above for the radical change of the EU, it is certain that the results will become obvious quite soon.

## **6. Conclusion:**

According to the results of the research and the questionnaire, we are able to comprehend that all member states of the EU do have equal rights and responsibilities towards the Union. These rights, common policies and goals are rarely met any more. However, and this is mostly due to the fact that the EU currently has many different crises to face. Member states tend to focus on national interests as a priority and not look beyond their borders or the whole picture, which leads to a lack of solidarity, common goals and equal rights within the European Union.

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