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Greece's Odyssey in the EU: Integration and Challenges

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Abstract: This paper aims to present the accession and integration process of the Hellenic Republic through the course of history, as well as underline the most noteworthy crises and the significant role of the EEC and later of the EU and its institutions in the attempts to alleviate them.

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Historical Background

After the 2nd World War and a following Civil War (1944-1949) Greece was found in a state of political, financial and societal instability and, therefore, in desperate need of support from external actors. That's when the country turned to its European neighbors seeking cooperation in order to achieve financial flourishing. The first step towards that goal was the accession in the Council of Europe on the 9th of August 1949, only three months after the institution's establishment and consequently the ratification of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR)¹.

Association Agreement

After 1958, when Konstantinos Karamanlis was elected as Prime Minister for the second time, Greece's then government initiated a more committed and determined development process by reaching out to the EEC in hopes of achieving the integration of the country and, thus, its financial flourishing and modernization by following the European standards. The negotiations between the two parties began a little later and, after a long period of discussions, the agreement was finalized and signed on the 9th of July 1961, making Greece an associate member of the Community. This would mark the first time that article 238 of the Treaty of Rome would be put in practice, an article which allows the Community to secure an agreement with a third state giving both parties mutual rights and responsibilities ².

The aim of the agreement was threefold: 1) establishment of a customs union covering all trades between the EEC and Greece, 2) intensification of the parties' cooperation to achieve full harmonization of policies and 3) funding of the country with financial resources in order to carry through with the measures listed in the agreement. Furthermore, the agreement founded the Council of Association, a body which would overlook the application of the measures that had to be taken by both parties. More specifically, concerning the third point, it was mentioned that, during the first 5 years

¹ <https://www.mfa.gr/exoteriki-politiki/i-ellada-stous-diethneis-organismous/sumboulio-tis-europis.html>

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/DE/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:11957E/TXT>

from the entry into force of the agreement, Greece would be able to withdraw a total amount of 125 million dollars in loans for the purposes of the implementation of the Agreement, after getting authorization from the European Investment Bank, the institution which would also be responsible for providing the resources³.

When it comes to the process for the adaptation of Greece to the European policies as well as the formation of the customs unit, the explanation in the articles is very well developed and described in great detail. Firstly, there would be a 22-year transitional period during which both parties (Greece and the Six founding countries of the EEC) would be obliged to eliminate custom duties on approximately all imports and exports of goods between them, an elimination which would take place gradually and would be split into 8 parts of minor reductions of the tariffs during the years⁴. Special provisions were included regarding raw tobacco, raisins and other agricultural products in order to help the country eventually adjust to the agricultural policy of the Community⁵. Lastly, regarding the trade with third countries, Greece was to adopt the Common External Tariff within the same time period that is mentioned above⁶.

However, given the associated country's unstable economic situation as well as its efforts to provide the Hellenic people with a more promising standard of living, it was cited in the Agreement that when an emergency situation arises, Greece could refrain from further reducing the custom duties on imports but, instead, increase them in order to reassure its financial future⁷.

One of the most important points of the Agreement, though, is the Article 72 which stated that the Six founding states would take into consideration the case of the Mediterranean country's full accession after seeing to the

³ Agreement on the financial protocol annexed to the agreement establishing an association between the EEC and Greece (Athens, 9 July 1961) https://www.cvce.eu/education/unit-content/-/unit/en/02bb76df-d066-4c08-a58a-d4686a3e68ff/1039c1de-c68c-43a2-a45a-66aef48c5c6f#69592260-f1a5-4f5f-9cdb-db2eb0ffbf57_en&overlay

⁴ Article 6, Article 14 of the Association Agreement, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:31963D0106>

⁵ Note by the Council on the Association Agreement between the EEC and Greece (24 August 1962)

⁶ Article 20 of the Association Agreement <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:31963D0106>

⁷ Article 18 of the Association Agreement.

fact that it has fulfilled all of its obligations according to the Association Agreement. Thanks to this clause the country's politicians appeared to be more optimistic for a future integration despite the massive efforts they would have to go through to achieve this. In fact, M. Panayiotis Kanellopoulos, the Vice-President of the Council of Ministers, during his speech after the signing of the Agreement, emphasized on the financial growth that the country would witness after the establishment of an economic union with the Six founding states⁸. Moreover, the Prime Minister, Konstantinos Karamanlis, cited that he sees the EEC not only as a unity of economic importance, but one with great political aims that will help solidify democracy and worldwide peace⁹. Therefore, it could be said that, despite some opinions of the opposition party, most of the Greek people apprehended the Association Agreement as a source of hope after overcoming many hardships, even though they still had to go through massive efforts to reach the final aim, the full accession to the EEC.

1967-1974

Six years after the signing of the Association Agreement, a group of Greek Army officers organized a *coup d'état* in order to overthrow the government of Panayiotis Kanellopoulos, as a response to the political instability that the country was experiencing the last few years. More specifically, on the 21st of April 1967 and under the leadership of colonel Georgios Papadopoulos, they forged king Constantine's signature and announced, through the national radio broadcast, that the king had signed a royal decree stating that Greece was to be put under the state of siege according to article 91 of the constitution¹⁰. As a result, articles 5,6,8,10,11,12,14,18,20,95,97 of the

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https://www.cvce.eu/obj/speech_by_panaiotis_kanellopoulos_at_the_signature_of_the_association_agreement_between_greece_and_the_eec_9_july_1961-en-80bf364c-5c95-4077-8401-770fb5edd390.html

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https://www.cvce.eu/obj/address_by_konstantinos_karamanlis_at_the_signature_of_the_association_agreement_between_greece_and_the_eec_9_july_1961-en-9d82240f-52e9-4965-aede-0647fec81cd5.html

¹⁰ States of Emergency: Their Impact on Human Rights; A Study (1983)
<https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.icj/staeihr0001&id=143&collection=civil&index=>

constitution, provisions that concerned human rights and liberties, were suspended “in order to protect the public interest and the country from internal risks”¹¹. Namely, the colonels banned the freedom of association, the freedom of speech, the circulation in the streets, they disrupted the functioning of schools, but most importantly they arrested civilians and tortured them. The “Regime of the Colonels”, as it was called, imposed a 7-year-long military dictatorship that took its toll on the Association Agreement and the country’s relations with Europe and other countries in general.

Due to the fact that this new regime was opposed to the principle of democracy, one of the founding principles of the EEC according to the treaties, as well as other values, such as the respect of human rights, the Communities disapproved of it and, consequently, that led to the deterioration of the relationship that was built between them, thus leading to the ‘freezing’ of the Association Agreement. The European Institutions, also, portrayed a significant role in the condemnation of the new Hellenic political reality and indicated their opposition (stance) through some suppressive procedures. Firstly, many discussions, debates and questions took place within multiple sittings of the European Parliament, which in the end responded that the *coup d’état* significantly compromised the association with the Communities and expressed its concern for the Greek democrats who were undergoing such a drastic political change. Moreover, it was implied that the junta violated continuously the European Convention of Human Rights as it was asked of the country to abstain from further infringement of civil rights and liberties¹².

Moving on to the Commission, this institution had to deal with a case that was brought upon it by Sweden, Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands, in which the forementioned countries accused Greece of violating multiple articles of the European Convention of Human Rights, precisely Articles 5,6,8,9,10,11,14, and 15¹³. After the 2-year-long examination and having

¹¹

https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%A0%CF%81%CE%B1%CE%BE%CE%B9%CE%BA%CF%8C%CF%80%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%B1_%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%82_21%CE%B7%CF%82_%CE%91%CF%80%CF%81%CE%B9%CE%BB%CE%AF%CE%BF%CF%85

¹² See Van Coufoudakis EEC and the ‘Freezing’ of The Greek Association 1967-1974 pp. 115-116.

¹³ See The Greek Case Report of the Sub-Commission p. 1.

taken into account the report of the Sub-Commission, the Commission finally stated that Greece did not present adequate evidence proving that the military coup was given rise to due to Communist threat, hence no particular public emergency existed. In addition to that, the defendant country also failed to prove that the suspension of the above-mentioned articles of the Greek Constitution was put into place within the framework of the Convention and the limitations that it provided for the restriction of civil rights and liberties¹⁴.

The final report of the European Commission of Human Rights was forwarded to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe which initiated a suppressive procedure in order to declare whether Greece was justifiably being accused of infringement, as well as to decide potential measures that the country's government would need to take. Under the pressure of multitudinous participation in the conferment, the junta opted for the withdrawal of Greece from the Council of Europe and the European Convention of Human Rights¹⁵.

Events before the official Accession Treaty

Greece applied for full accession on July 12th, 1975. It was very important to the Greek Government and especially to Greek Prime Minister Constantinos Karamanlis that Greece became a fully integrated member of the European Economic Community as that would be of extreme significance and benefit to many different aspects. More specifically, a full accession would firstly provide a necessary institutional framework by the Community, which would help stabilize the newly adopted democracy. Furthermore, the accession would contribute to a much-needed economic development and structural modernization whilst also allowing Greece to establish its position in international relationships and create new connections, besides the United States of America.¹⁶

According to article 237 of the Treaty of Rome, the European Commission is obliged to state its opinion regarding the application for accession to the Community. Therefore, on January 29th, 1976, the Commission published its opinion about Greece's application, showcasing many different concerns

¹⁴ See States of Emergency: Their Impact on Human Rights: A Study (1983) p. 163.

¹⁵ See States of Emergency: Their Impact on Human Rights: A Study (1983) p. 164.

¹⁶ <https://www.mfa.gr/en/foreign-policy/greece-in-the-eu/greeces-course-in-the-eu.html>

that needed to be first addressed before Greece became a full member state, with the introduction of a 7–8-year probationary period, which would consist of implementation of measures of substantial magnitude, spanning across a variety of sectors, with the most notable being agriculture and economy. The Commission wanted to ensure that the necessary structural changes regarding the harmonization of the Greek economy and the previous necessary development of the agricultural field, both of which didn't meet the Community's standards for member states, would be done with ease. A description for the latter was "small, often unproductive holdings, difficult soil conditions, problems in applying modern technology and substantial hidden unemployment underlie this sector relatively low share of the national product notwithstanding the high proportion of the country's active population employed in agriculture" whereas the former was suffering due to regional disparities and the majority of investments being in the area of Athens-Piraeus, while also having a deficit in the country's exchange reserves for the first time since the beginning of the dictatorship and facing a period of high inflation¹⁷. The ease with which these issues could be combated would be guaranteed by Greece not being a member state, which would provide a necessary flexibility that otherwise wouldn't be available, leading to a disruption in the common market¹⁸.

It is also worth noting that the European Commission also expressed concerns regarding the relationship between Greece and Turkey and the need to resolve any differences that may still exist, while also wanting to protect the Association Agreement between the EEC and Turkey. But now, the change in Greece's status affects their existing relationship¹⁹. Moreover, the readiness of the Community to further expand was doubted, as it still hadn't absorbed the repercussions of the last enlargement, posing questions as to whether it was the right time for another country to enter.²⁰

¹⁷ Opinion on Greek application for membership (transmitted to the Council by the Commission on 29 January 1976) paragraph n. 18.

¹⁸ Opinion on Greek application for membership (transmitted to the Council by the Commission on 29 January 1976) paragraph n. 12.

¹⁹ Opinion on Greek application for membership (transmitted to the Council by the Commission on 29 January 1976) paragraphs n. 6 and 7.

²⁰ Opinion on Greek application for membership (transmitted to the Council by the Commission on 29 January 1976) paragraphs n. 13 and 14.

Despite the negative opinion of the European Commission, the Council of Ministers of the Nine Member States approved the application on February 9th 1976, mainly because of the support of some prominent Member States : France, who supported Greece on political grounds due to its geographical position and the need to strengthen the democratic regime, Germany, who already had strong trade links with Greece and wanted to reinforce them, and the Netherlands, with great efforts made by their Minister of Foreign Affairs, Max van der Stoel.²¹ The official accession negotiations were initiated 5 months later and the Treaty of Accession was signed in May of 1979 in Athens after a second opinion of the Commission (which was favorable this time)²², and ratified by the Greek Parliament in the following month. The Hellenic Republic officially became a member state on the 1st of January 1981.

Derogations and transitional measures within the Treaty

Although the opinion of the Commission was rejected, the Accession Treaty of 1979 included a comprehensive set of transitional measures (Part Four of the Treaty), similar to the ones that the Commission originally proposed in 1976, that focused on addressing the disparities between Greece and the Community, which mainly consisted of economical, administrative, and societal derogations. These provisions aimed at aiding the integration process and ensuring a gradual and smooth transition for Greece. The measures that were included mainly regarded the free movement of goods (Title II, articles 24-43), the free movement of persons, services, and capital (Title III, articles 44-56), and agriculture (Title IV, articles 57-114). It should also be noted that according to article 23, the people of Greece would select their 24 representatives in the Assembly (now known as European Parliament) with their direct vote.²³

Moving on to Title II, the Hellenic Republic was obliged to gradually adjust and abolish its customs duties on imports (article 25) and exports (article 29) with the rest of the Member States, while it was also not allowed to have lower duties with any other third state (article 26). Furthermore, there were

²¹ <https://www.cvce.eu/en/recherche/unit-content/-/unit/02bb76df-d066-4c08-a58a-d4686a3e68ff/4a6854b3-62e2-4e41-aba6-9ccf2cf5a859>

²² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:11979H/AVI/COM>

²³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:11979H/TXT>

provisions related to the customs duties with third states, in order to progressively incorporate the Common Customs Tariff (article 31) and the ECSC unified tariff (article 32) and provisions regarding the lift of the quantitative restrictions on both imports and exports (article 35), with the Hellenic Republic having the choice to retain them only for specific products listed in the Treaty such as fertilizers, motor vehicles, and generators (article 36 + Annex III).

Meanwhile, in Chapter I of Title III, the Treaty is referring to workers and the provisions that will be applied to them and their movement in the Community. According to it, the provisions of article 48 of the EEC Treaty (Treaty of Rome), which states that:

1. The free movement of workers shall be ensured within the Community not later than at the date of the expiry of the transitional period. 2. This shall involve the abolition of any discrimination based on nationality between workers of the Member States, as regards employment, remuneration and other working conditions. 3. It shall include the right, subject to limitations justified by reasons of public order, public safety and public health: (a) to accept offers of employment actually made; (b) to move about freely for this purpose within the territory of Member States; (c) to stay in any Member State in order to carry on an employment in conformity with the legislative and administrative provisions governing the employment of the workers of that State; and (d) to live, on conditions which shall be the subject of implementing regulations to be laid down by the Commission, in the territory of a Member State after having been employed there. 4. The provisions of this Article shall not apply to employment in the public administration²⁴

would be also applied between the Hellenic Republic and the current Member States, but would be subject to transitional provisions, as they are presented in articles 45 – 48, referring to articles of other Regulations and Directives that were already in place in regards to specific details about the workers' ability to be employed in a Member State and theirs' plus their

²⁴ https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/treaty_establishing_the_european_economic_community_rome_25_march_1957-en-cca6ba28-0bf3-4ce6-8a76-6b0b3252696e.html

families' respective rights, and the different timeframes up until which these articles would be enforced. In Chapter 2, there are provisions which allow Greece to defer the liberalization of capital movements as it is required by article 67 of the EEC Treaty and the Directives of 11th May 1960 and 18th December 1962, within specific timeframes. Both direct investments and invisible transfers related to tourism are considered capital transfers. For these provisions to be carried out undisrupted, the Hellenic authorities would be consulting the Commission about the procedures and their implementation (article 49 paragraph 2). The Commission, in turn, would also be able to consult the Monetary Committees and submit proposals to the Council (article 56). All these measures aimed to mitigate the possible challenges that could arise in the accession period and to help the Hellenic Republic maintain a level of economic stability during the process of harmonizing with the economic structures of the EEC.

In Title IV, the General Provisions (articles 57-73) present the changes that need to take place in the market of the agricultural sector and the alignment of the prices of the agricultural products in the Hellenic Republic with the prices within the Community. In addition to these changes, there are provisions regarding Community aid packages given under the common agricultural policy while there are also detailed provisions for every different agricultural product until article 109, with each article referring to the General Provisions that are applicable to the specific product.

Besides all the forementioned articles, the Treaty contains a few more noteworthy ones, which are part of Title V, named "External Relations". According to article 117, the Hellenic Republic should progressively align its tariff rates with the Community's System of preferential rates for certain products by the end of 1985, whereas according to articles 118-120, the existing (signed before 1981) agreements between the EEC and certain third states will be applicable to Greece post accession. In case that the transitional measures create serious issues before the end of 1985 in any sector of the Greek economy which is affected by the articles of the Treaty, article 130 gives both the Hellenic Republic and other Member States the ability to apply, only until 1987, for authorization, in order to take protective measures and ameliorate the situation.

Finally, in Part Five, the Treaty describes the changes that are going to take place in every single institution of the EEC after the accession of Greece (such as the enlargement of the different Committees).

Therefore, it has been made clear that the Hellenic Republic had to undergo numerous changes in many sectors to be able to gradually deal with all the different issues it was facing and to be on par with the Community's standards for Member States. A very important detail was the fact that most of the transitional measures provided a timeframe of at least a few years, which would allow for a smoother process of integration, minimizing the possible negative repercussions that an abrupt transition would create on a socioeconomic level.

The years leading up to the Eurozone Crisis

After the Accession, the actual Europeanisation of Greece wasn't free of difficulties. According to Sklias and Maris²⁵, the Hellenic Republic, although having typically adopted the *Acquis Communautaire* and numerous Directives, struggled to successfully implement them or the success wasn't fully effective, a habit that carried on for decades, setting the foundation of an environment in which the state could never truly flourish. Greece however made important steps towards European integration by becoming a member of the European Economic Area (1994)²⁶, the Schengen Area (signed in 1992, full implementation and abolishment of internal border control in 2000²⁷²⁸), and the Eurozone (2001), while it was one of the first 12 Member States to launch Euro coins and banknotes (2002)²⁹. Despite these, the abovementioned issues, in combination with the tendency of Greek Governments to have populism (and subsequently cronyism) as a staple in their party's politics³⁰, resulted in a state where corruption and patronage were the norm, with a pension policy which consumed 1/10th of the states GDP and which even resulted in an independent committee to warn Greece

²⁵ The Political Dimension of the Greek Financial Crisis, Pantelis Sklias and Georgios Maris

²⁶ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:21994A0103\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:21994A0103(01))

²⁷ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:42000A0922\(06\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:42000A0922(06))

²⁸ https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/visa-service/-/231202#content_0

²⁹ https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/euro/eu-countries-and-euro/greece-and-euro_en

³⁰ Greece's Trouble with European Union Accession, Akis Kalaitzidis and Nikolaos Zahariadis

in 1997 that, at this rate, the pension system would collapse by 2007³¹. All of these, led to the famous Greek Economic Crisis of 2009.

The debt crisis of 2009 and the “Troika” intervention

The extremely loose fiscal policy of Greek Governments, paired with the populism that dominated the years 1981-1989, which caused an overly extended public sector, finally led to the acknowledgment in 2009 by George's Papandreou government that the budget deficit had reached 15.6 % of the country's GDP, opposed to the previously stated 5 %³². The country has officially entered a state of economic recession.

There are people who argue that the main motivating factor for European integration is merely the economic interest of the state³³. The Hellenic Republic truly authenticates this argument, as it had already taken loans from European countries and banks and then turned to Europe for help in order to manage to repay those same loans. The Greek Government started negotiations and came to an agreement for a rescue plan, which involved a mechanism that relied on bilateral loans to Greece from other EU countries and loans from IMF at interest rates, which were lower than the market ones³⁴. The first memorandum signed between the Hellenic Republic and “Troika” (a single decision group created by three entities, the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund) in May 2010 revolved around a focused program to stabilize its economy, become more competitive, and restore market confidence with the support of a €110 billion financing package.³⁵ This program required budget cuts and major austerity measures that included freeze on public sector wages, higher VAT taxes, cutting pension and social service payments, lifting retirement age, new business taxes, and many other austerity measures.³⁶ This was then followed by a second bailout package in March

³¹ The Greek Pension Reforms: Crises and NDC Attempts Awaiting Completion, Milton Nektarios and Platon Tinios.

³² GREECE: FROM OPPORTUNITY TO CRISIS AND BACK?, Susanna Vogt.

³³ Andrew Moravcsik, as mentioned in “Greece Crisis and European Integration A Critical Approach to Regional Integration, Dhananjay Tripathi”.

³⁴ The Greek Crisis: Causes and Implications, Georgios P. Kouretas and Prodromos Vlamis.

³⁵ <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2015/09/28/04/53/socar050210a>

³⁶ Analysis and Outlook of the Greek Financial Crisis, Dr. Suhail Abboushi.

2012, worth €130 billion, under three conditions : The first requirement was to finalize an agreement whereby all private holders of governmental bonds would accept a 50% haircut with yields reduced to 3.5%, thus facilitating a €100bn debt reduction for Greece. The second requirement was that Greece needed to implement another demanding austerity package in order to bring its budget deficit into sustainable territory. The third and final requirement was that a majority of the Greek politicians should sign an agreement guaranteeing their continued support for the new austerity package, even after the elections in April 2012.³⁷ The new austerity measures were even stricter, with further reduction of pensions and social security payments, massive layoffs in the public sector (around 150.000), and cutting of the minimum wage to just €586.³⁸ All of this naturally led to a great social recession. Unemployment rates reached an average of 27.4 % in 2013 according to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT)³⁹, while it peaked at 28.3 % in July 2013⁴⁰. At the same time, the people of Greece were suffering, as the 33% increase in deaths by suicide in Greece during the early years of recession (2009–2015) shows.⁴¹

As a result of the socioeconomical situation, a new political party came into power in the 2015 elections. The left-wing, anti-austerity Syriza party won, breaking more than forty years of two-party rule. Incoming Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras said he would push for a renegotiation of bailout terms, debt cancellation, and renewed public sector spending—setting up a showdown with international creditors that threatens Greek default and potential exit from the monetary union. The Greek government missed its €1.6 billion payment to the IMF when its bailout expired on June 30, making it the first developed country to effectively default to the Fund.⁴² Negotiations between the Syriza leadership and its official creditors fell apart days before, when Prime Minister Tsipras proposed a referendum on the EU proposals.⁴³

³⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Economic_Adjustment_Programme_for_Greece#cite_note-bbc-2012-02-09-10.

³⁸ <https://vouliwatch.gr/news/article/i-lixi-toy-mnimonioy-kai-i-exodos-apo-tin-krisi>

³⁹ <https://www.statistics.gr/documents/20181/9422286e-6c03-45ee-91f2-7a60d6375bac>

⁴⁰ <https://tradingeconomics.com/greece/unemployment-rate>

⁴¹ Suicides in Greece before and during the period of austerity by sex and age group: Relationship to unemployment and economic variables, Konstantinos N. Fountoulakis

⁴² <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/greeces-debt-crisis-timeline>

⁴³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33302526>

The referendum took place to decide if Greece would accept the bailout conditions, and 61% of voters chose “No”.⁴⁴ Despite that, a week later, on July 12th 2015, Tsipras came to an agreement with lenders for a new European Stability Mechanism program.⁴⁵ The agreement was for a loan of €85 billion and involved measures regarding the VAT, the pension eligibility, and the relaunch of privatization.⁴⁶ The bailout program was completed in August 2018. Since then, although Greece still has a long way to go to pay off all its debts, the economy is following an upwards trajectory and is slowly growing, whilst unemployment rates are dropping.⁴⁷ With the help of the EU’s financial aid packages, the Hellenic Republic was able to mitigate the financial damages of the COVID-19 pandemic⁴⁸ and as of today, the Greek economy is expected to keep growing⁴⁹.

The Refugee Crisis of 2015-2016

After the debt crisis, and while still facing many hardships and consequences from it, the country was immensely affected by the enormous refugee wave that arrived to the European peninsula over the years 2015-2016 due to its geographical position on the eastern borders on the Mediterranean Sea. It was reported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that during that period over 800,000 refugees reached the Greek land and mainly the Eastern Aegean Islands⁵⁰. It can evidently be noted that this number was extremely large for the capacity of the country, therefore, there were many adjustments to be made regarding the implementation of the European Union’s Migration Policy in order to efficiently cope with the situation. It is worth mentioning, though, that before the refugee crisis of 2015, in 2011 Greece was faced with a condemnation by the European Court of Human Rights, the well-known M.S.S. Case⁵¹, which eventually forced the country to take immediate measures in order to improve its asylum policy

⁴⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2015_Greek_bailout_referendum.

⁴⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_Economic_Adjustment_Programme_for_Greece

⁴⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33905686>

⁴⁷ <https://foreignpolicy.com/sponsored/greece-a-remarkable-economic-recovery/>

⁴⁸ <https://unric.org/en/eu-approves-coronavirus-aid-package/>

⁴⁹ GREECE'S RECOVERY CONTINUES, Guillaume DERRIEN

⁵⁰ UNHCR Operational Data Portal
<https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179>

⁵¹ <https://www.asylumlawdatabase.eu/en/content/ecthr-mss-v-belgium-and-greece-gc-application-no-3069609>

and comply better with the European Legislation provisions on the matter. However, no notable progress was made as the country still suffered from inadequate infrastructures and financial supply.

The European Acquis on Asylum consists of multiple Directives and some Regulations that discuss the criteria that need to be met by third-state-nationals to be considered asylum seekers and, consequently, to be granted asylum, the member states' obligations as reception countries and the refugee's rights. This legislation is also based on the Geneva Convention of 1951 which emphasizes on the principle of non-refoulement that needs to be respected by the contracting parties⁵². As a member state, Greece is obligated to adopt the EU Law acquis through national legislation so as to adjust the provisions to its own capacities. One of the first steps towards that goal was taken in 2011 with the Law 3907/2011 thanks to which the Asylum Service, the Appeal Committee and the First Reception Service started functioning. Yet, the institutions' actions were not well coordinated at first due to the state's economic situation and lack of personnel⁵³. Moreover, a Migration Code was introduced in 2014 (Law 4251/2014) which settled the issue of stay permits, but could not be applied for the cases of EU citizens, refugees and asylum seekers⁵⁴. Lastly, in 2016 the Law 4375/2016 was introduced, a new approach to the institutions that were already founded with Law 3907/2011, although more organized and with some new features regarding their function⁵⁵.

There were two interventions from the EU, however, that were expected to contribute to the better dealing with the situation. Firstly, the so-called 'hotspot approach', an operation published by the European Commission which enshrined not only the housing of the third-state nationals that arrived to European soil in hotspots, but also an organized attempt at identifying and fingerprinting them⁵⁶ while enlisting the help of the

⁵² The 1951 Refugee Convention UNHCR <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/1951-refugee-convention>

⁵³ See Migration in Greece: Recent Developments A. Triantafyllidou.

⁵⁴ Idia me panw.

⁵⁵ <https://migration.gov.gr/nomothesia-1-2/nomothesia-archi-prosfygon/>

⁵⁶ On the frontline: the hotspot approach to managing migration [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556942/IPOL_STU\(2016\)556942_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556942/IPOL_STU(2016)556942_EN.pdf)

European Agency for Asylum (EUAA), Frontex, Europol and Eurojust⁵⁷. Thanks to this operation, Greece was able to set up hotspots both in the Eastern Aegean islands and the mainland, although it was later proved a fruitless measure as the country could not meet the capacity expectations and could house very few people in need⁵⁸. Many international actors, such as the UNHCR and other NGOs noticed the Hellenic Republic's difficulty in putting the operation into force so there was a mass mobilization for aid through voluntary work, though still with no notable outcome⁵⁹.

Turning now to the other significant move of the EU, the organization decided to come to an agreement with Turkey in 2016 in order to facilitate the asylum granting procedure and to alleviate the situation in Greece. More specifically, the Agreement enshrined that asylum seekers that arrived in Greece after a specific date would be obliged, and thus helped, to return to Turkey. Up to that point, the first country had only received approximately 14,000 asylum applications out of 800,000 third-state nationals that arrived to its land in total. However, after the agreement, refugees who were eager to be forwarded to other European countries, were forced to stay in Greece if they had reached the Greek land before the 20th of March⁶⁰. The number of refugees 'trapped' in the Hellenic soil were still extremely high and non-manageable for its capacities but still some efforts were made. One of them was the Law 4375/2016, which marked an effort to implement to Asylum Procedure Directive, but was heavily criticized due to the fact that it did not comply with the Directive⁶¹.

Overall, due to the fact that the inflow of third-state nationals was larger than expected and despite the help that Greece received from external

⁵⁷ See Asylum Information Database <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/asylum-procedure/access-procedure-and-registration/reception-and-identification-procedure/>

⁵⁸ The Greek response to the refugee crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean Mirekoc Report https://mirekoc.ku.edu.tr/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Mirekoc_Report_The-Greek-response-to-the-refugee-crisis-in-Eastern-Mediterranean-web.pdf

⁵⁹ Turning the Refugee Crisis into an Opportunity? Current Challenges for Greece and Suggestions for Action Anna Triantafyllidou.

⁶⁰ The refugee crisis in Greece in the aftermath of the 20 March 2016 EU-Turkey Agreement - Sakellis Spyropoulou Ziomas.

⁶¹ On the frontline: the hotspot approach to managing migration.

actors, the situation was still non-manageable and the conditions in the hotspots continued to stay unbearable for the refugees ⁶².

Conclusion

As all the forementioned events show, it is clear that Greece's accession process in the EEC, although long lasting, had positive effects on both the Greek society and economy. Through the integration process and with the aid of the EU a variety of sectors and infrastructures were modernized but nevertheless, Greece's foundational issues led to further problems. Despite that, the EU played a crucial role in preventing the bankruptcy of the Greek economy, and also provided a legislative framework to properly manage the massive waves of refugees, which was sadly not effectively implemented by the Greek Government. All in all, being an EU Member State offers an increased opportunity of intergovernmental and supranational cooperation, which in turn allows for a more robust handling of possible issues and a greater potential for overall growth.

⁶² The refugee crisis in Greece in the aftermath of the 20 March 2016 EU-Turkey Agreement - Sakellis Spyropoulou Ziomas.