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THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE FUTURE EUROPEAN COMMON ECONOMIC SPACE

Many countries dream of becoming a part of the European Union, and we all know this is because of the policies and agreements offered. Being a part of the European Union has its many advantages but it can also have disadvantages that come with it. Becoming a member of the EU is a complex procedure, which does not happen overnight. Once an applicant country meets the conditions for membership, it must implement EU rules and regulations in all areas. Any country that satisfies the conditions for membership can apply. These conditions are known as the 'Copenhagen criteria' and include a free-market economy, a stable democracy and the rule of law, and the acceptance of all EU legislation, including of the euro.

Europe is ageing fast and life expectancy is reaching unprecedented levels. With a median age of 45, Europe will be the "oldest" region in the world by 2030. New family structures, a changing population, urbanisation and more diverse working lives are affecting the way social cohesion is built. In the space of a generation, the average European worker has gone from having a job for life to having more than ten in a career. There are more women in work than ever before but achieving real gender equality will mean breaking down persisting barriers. At a time when Europe's working age population is shrinking, it needs to mobilise the full potential of its talents. This is doubly important as Europe gets to grips with a profound digitisation of society which is already blurring the lines between workers and self-employed, goods and services, or consumers and producers. Many of today's jobs did not exist a decade ago. Many more will emerge in the years ahead. It is likely that most children entering primary school today will end up working in new job types that do not yet exist. The challenges of increased use of technology and automation will affect all jobs and industries. Making the most of the new opportunities whilst mitigating any negative impact will require a massive investment in skills and a major rethink of education and lifelong learning systems. It will also call for the roll-out of new social rights to accompany the changing world of work. At the same time, Europe is committed to an ambitious decarbonisation of its economy and to cutting harmful emissions. And we will have to continue adapting to growing climate and environmental pressures. Our industry, cities and households will need to change the way they operate and are powered. We are already a leader in "smart cities", in the efficient use of natural resources and in the global fight against climate change. Our firms hold 40% of the world's patents for renewable energy technologies. One of our major challenges will be to bring innovative solutions to market, at home and abroad.

A country wishing to join the EU submits a membership application to the Council, which asks the Commission to assess the applicant's ability to meet the Copenhagen criteria. If the Commission's opinion is positive, the Council must then agree upon a negotiating mandate. Negotiations are then

formally opened on a subject-by-subject basis. Due to the huge volume of EU rules and regulations each candidate country must adopt as national law, the negotiations take time to complete. The candidates are supported financially, administratively and technically during this pre-accession period. There are five recognised candidates for future membership of the European Union: Turkey (applied in 14 April 1987), Macedonia (applied in 22 March 2004), Montenegro (applied in 2008), Albania (applied in 2009) and Serbia (applied in 2009). All except Albania and Macedonia have started accession negotiations. Kosovo, whose independence is not recognised by five EU member states, and Bosnia and Herzegovina are recognised as potential candidates for membership by the EU. Bosnia and Herzegovina has formally submitted an application for membership, while Kosovo has a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU, which generally precedes the lodging of membership application. In July 2014, Jean-Claude Juncker announced that the EU has no plans to expand before 2019 while Serbia and Montenegro, the most advanced candidates, are expected to join before 2025. While the others are progressing, Turkish talks are at an effective standstill. There are, however, other states in Europe, which either seek membership or could potentially apply if their present foreign policy changes, or the EU gives a signal that they might now be included on the enlargement agenda. However, these are not formally part of the current agenda, which is already delayed due to bilateral disputes in the Balkans and difficulty in fully implementing the acquis communautaire. In 2005, the European Commission suggested in a strategy paper that the present enlargement agenda could potentially block the possibility of a future accession of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Olli Rehn has said on occasion that the EU should "avoid overstretching our capacity, and instead consolidate our enlargement agenda," adding, "this is already a challenging agenda for our accession process.

While there may be many different views on where the European Union is headed in the near future, I will look at some of the most popular beliefs concerning the European Union.

A CHANGING PLACE IN AN EVOLVING WORLD: Europe is home to the world's largest single market and second most used currency. It is the largest trade power and development and humanitarian aid donor. Thanks in part to Horizon 2020, the world's biggest multinational research programme, Europe is at the cutting edge of innovation. Its diplomacy holds real weight and helps keep the world safer and more sustainable, as shown by the historic deal with Iran on its nuclear programme or the leading role the EU played in the Paris Climate Agreement and the adoption by the United Nations of the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. Europe is attractive to many of its partners. While no further accession to the EU is expected in the short term, the prospect itself is a powerful tool to project stability and security along our borders. The EU works actively with its neighbourhood whether it be in the east or in the south. From strengthened partnership with Ukraine to the wide-ranging cooperation with our African partners, Europe's role as a positive global force is more important than ever.

A PROFOUNDLY TRANSFORMED ECONOMY AND SOCIETY: The global financial and economic crisis that started in 2008 in the United States shook Europe to its core. Thanks to determined action, the EU economy is now back on a more stable footing with unemployment falling to its lowest level since the "great recession" hit. However, the recovery is still unevenly distributed across society and regions. Addressing the legacy of the crisis, from long-term unemployment to high levels of public and private debt in many parts of Europe, remains an urgent priority. The challenge is particularly acute

for the younger generation. For the first time since the Second World War, there is a real risk that the generation of today's young adults ends up less well-off than their parents. Europe cannot afford to lose the most educated age group it has ever had and let generational inequality condemn its future. These developments have fuelled doubts about the EU's social market economy and its ability to deliver on its promise to leave no one behind and to ensure that every generation is better off than the previous one.

TRUST AND LEGITIMACY: The various changes affecting the world and the real sense of insecurity felt by many have given rise to a growing disaffection with mainstream politics and institutions at all levels. This often manifests itself through indifference and mistrust towards the action of public authorities. And it also creates a vacuum too easily filled by populist and nationalist rhetoric. Restoring trust, building consensus and creating a sense of belonging is harder in an era where information has never been so plentiful, so accessible, yet so difficult to grasp. The 24/7 nature of the news cycle is quicker and harder to keep up with and respond to than it ever has been before. More tweets are now sent every day than in a whole year ten years ago, around a third of the world's population will use social media networks.

The European model is changing forever with rapid expansion to the East, doubling the number of countries and embracing nations that are extremely poor in comparison. Governance will be complex, and so will be the culture mix. Face the facts: ethnic cleansing is a daily reality in Europe - even in the UK. Every night somewhere in Belfast we see sectarian attacks and every morning the removal vans arrive to take another family away to another location. It is the same in Bosnia, and Kosovo, both part of old Yugoslavia, yet another part of the same old nation is entering the EU: Slovenia. So here we have nations rushing to become one, who cannot even stop people in the same street butchering each other because they want to be so different. So expect growth, extension, vast economic trading areas, and with it growing tensions, economic tensions, xenophobia and resentment. A big reason for this is the politics in EU member countries. Crucial elections loom in many this year, and populist parties opposed to the European project and in favor of referendums on membership of the euro, the EU or both are likely to do well. In an uncertain world, the allure of isolation may be tempting to some, but the consequences of division and fragmentation would be far-reaching. It would expose European countries and citizens to the spectre of their divided past and make them prey to the interests of stronger powers. Europe must now choose. There are as many opportunities as there are challenges. This can be Europe's hour, but it can only be seized by all 27 Member States acting together with common resolve. The White Paper report opened an honest and wideranging debate with citizens on how Europe should evolve in the years to come. Every voice should be heard. The European Commission, together with the European Parliament and Member States, will host a series of "Future of Europe Debates" across Europe's national Parliaments, cities and regions. The ideas and determination of the hundreds of millions of Europeans will be the catalyst of our progress. The White Paper is the European Commission's contribution to the Rome Summit. Like all anniversaries, Rome will be a natural time to reflect on the success of the last 60 years. However, it should also be viewed as the beginning of a process for the EU27 to decide together on the future of their Union. The EU is a unique project in which domestic priorities have been combined and sovereignty voluntarily pooled to better serve national and collective interests. It has not always been an easy journey, it has never been perfect, but it has shown its capacity to reform itself and has proven its value over time. Following the

motto of "unity in diversity", the EU and its Member States have been able to draw on the unique strengths and richness of their nations to achieve unprecedented progress. Beyond these three measures, which can be implemented without treaty change, lies a wide field with options for further democratisation of the European Union. From the perspective of the TDI, the aim of the process will be for the EU to evolve towards a Union of democratic states based on the rule of law, which also functions as a constitutional democracy of its own. Although the dream may take decades to be realised, in pursuing this goal the EU will ensure on the one hand that the citizens will receive a similar measure of protection from the Union as they enjoy from their member states and, on the other hand, that they will be able to participate with the same conviction in the democratic life of the Union as they do in that of their home countries.

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