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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER Dr KOSTAS KARAMANLIS
AT THE CONFERENCE TO MARK THE 10th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE PASSING OF KONSTANTINOS KARAMANLIS
CEPS in cooperation with the Konstantinos G. Karamanlis Foundation
“EVER DEEPER UNION;
POLITICAL RECIPES TO PROLONG THE SUCCESS STORY”

It is, indeed, a great pleasure for me to participate in this debate on Europe together with personalities, with whom we share common visions and struggles in favour of a common great ideal: the Union, our Union. The commitment and devotion of people, such as my good friends, the President of the Commission José Manuel Barroso and the President of the European Parliament Hans-Gert Pöttering, to this ideal is one of the strongest reasons why our Union has the capacity to overcome the turbulent times that we currently go through and turn out even stronger.

Today's meeting, as it has already been stressed, takes place at a critical juncture for Europe and, for that matter, the world at large. For several months now, the whole world faces the effects of a severe international financial crisis, the duration and intensity of which, is unpredictable and which inevitably affects our continent as well. This crisis is also testing the current model of economic governance of the EU ; It highlights the need for better coordination between monetary policy, fiscal policy and financial supervision. In addition, the EU budget could be stronger in order to meet the demands of the crisis and of course the EU is still not represented as a single entity, with one voice within international financial institutions.

The only credible response to this situation is European, as well as international, cooperation, coordinated action, determination and vision, so that we get over this in the less costly way possible, both economically and socially. Now, more than ever before, it is the time that citizens demand from the leadership concrete proof and vision, social responsibility and commitment to addressing their problems. Today, it is our duty to take action, in order to dispel the citizens' insecurity as regards their jobs, their concerns for the survival of their businesses, their deposits, their bank loans.

This is the ultimate test. This is where the effectiveness of our Union will be tested. Tested, in order to demonstrate that it is relevant; relevant to the European citizens' concerns. Concerns, which are common from the one edge of Europe to the other. Concerns addressed by means of common values and a common vision. We need to demonstrate that this Union is not limited to the construction of a complicated and, at the end of the day, potentially irrelevant edifice, but what binds it together is solidarity. Common answers, to common challenges. This was the cohesive substance that first put together our Union in its inception.

So, in my view, deepening comes first and foremost as a result of common values and then of effective institutions. Institutions, despite how carefully and in how balanced a way they have been created, cannot function properly, cannot be transformed effectively when necessary without jeopardizing the entire edifice, and have not the capacity on their own to endure challenges, if they are not founded on solid values and principles. The whole edifice of the Union, therefore, is not merely a technical construction of institutions; it holds a spirit, if I may use the word, a “soul” that makes it evolve and deepen.

So, the question we need to address is very clear: what is this cohesive substance that puts our Union together and which is its importance today? In a very simple way: What is it that Greeks and Swedish, British and Lithuanians, Romanians and Dutch have in common? What is it that the citizens of our Union have in common that makes them see themselves as active members of a living body, of a union not just of states and governments, but most of all of people and peoples.

I believe that the answer comes from the very inception of the European Communities, almost half a century ago. The catalyst, which led to the implementation of an idea that had for decades been maturing in the heads of the forerunners of our continent, politicians and intellectuals, namely the European idea, was the tragedy of two World Wars. The radical idea of the voluntary unification of European states gained ground and materialized, exactly because it became clear, it became very evident, where the opposite approach leads: distrust, intolerance, competition, confrontation. Out of this big tragedy came the realization of the great disasters that being divided entails and of the fact that our fortunes as Europeans are tied together, that our future is common and that there’s too much strength in union and so much weakness in division. We therefore ceded state power, power in isolation, in order to gain greater power in unification, European power.

Consequently, without of course comparing uneven situations, the current international crisis can act in this fashion precisely: it can, once again, clearly demonstrate to Europeans the benefits of our participation to the European family; benefits that we tend to consider as a given. Let’s just think of the consequences for individual economies and societies had they not been part of the security net and the potential offered by the Union; Imagine how it would have been today If there was no Union And. let’s just consider, in particular, the benefits enjoyed by the countries which participate in the Eurozone, the protection and stability that the Euro has offered to our economies, and the challenges facing those member states, which are still not part of this “inner family”. But, also, let’s prove in practice, at these critical moments, our commitment to European values: solidarity, the European social acquis, transparency, by making use of them as our guide of our common action in this difficult situation.

The crisis we are faced with may be the strongest and most effective catalyst that Europe needs today, in order to move forward. In that sense, I fully agree with President Barroso that we have got to see also the situation as an opportunity. The institutional approach to deepening does not function exactly as we expected. That’s the truth. And it definitely does not produce solid results. The experience of the Constitutional Treaty and the Treaty of Lisbon has made us wiser. What is really needed is to practically demonstrate to the European citizens that high expectations and declarations have a concrete context and effect in their everyday lives. That is why the standards, which will define and ultimately test the effectiveness and the future of our Union, will be the extent of our success in responding to this and the rest of the major challenges facing our continent and the globe in general: environment, energy, food, diseases, poverty.

In other words, deepening will be possible only to the extent to which the citizens of Europe realize it as part and precondition of a wider political agenda that guarantees tangible positive results in Europe and the world, for every European citizen and their family individually.

At this point, I would like to speak of the example of my country. The accession of Greece to the European family is admittedly attributed mainly to the political vision and the determination of Konstantinos Karamanlis, who saw the then European Community as a guarantee for stability, democracy and development. At the first, difficult times of the restoration of democracy, Karamanlis not only took upon himself the task of convincing European leaders about the necessity of Greece's accession to the European Community. It is common knowledge that, initially, a great deal, maybe the majority, of Greeks looked then at the EEC with great reservation, if not suspicion. This also holds true for almost the entirety of the political forces in the country, except Nea Demokratia, the party he himself founded. And yet, in a very few years, Greek citizens, irrespective of political orientation or party affiliation, as well as politicians who forcefully stood against accession to the European family, turned into the most fervent supporters of the European idea. How did that happen? By experiencing European solidarity in practice. By identifying the EEC with principles and values in its operation, which constitute the European identity. An identity, which not only complements the Greek identity, but also coincides with the Greek one.

The Greek people will never forget the support of European governments and peoples in our struggle for the restoration of democracy in our country. As we will never forget the substantial support of the EEC to the multifaceted development of Greece, from the first years of its accession to date. This sense of solidarity is what made Greeks, much more than any major material benefit, become Europeanists. And I would like to mention, at this point, two touching examples of such solidarity, in pleasant as well as tough moments, during the years of my term as Prime Minister:

- The first is the way our European partners shared the pride we all felt in the summer of 2004, when the Olympic Games returned to their birthplace to reconnect with the Greek and European values.
- The second is not a happy one. It is the tangible and substantial solidarity exhibited during the exceptionally harsh for all of us summer of 2007. And I would like to take the opportunity to once more thank my friend President Barroso for the immediate response of the European Commission, during the wildfires. For those who may argue that the European Union is nothing more than a union of interests, this demonstration of solidarity is the best, most convincing answer.

The example of Greece, which surpassed so quickly its reservations and suspicion to finally become part of the hard core of the Union and actively promote the European perspective of all its neighbours, indicates the way forward; the way of tangible solidarity, participation, acknowledgment that the destiny of the peoples of Europe is closely, strongly interwoven and that this fact makes us all stronger; the way of turning all those things that unite us into means for the most effective management of the everyday problems of citizens.

In this endeavour, we consider that the many different cultures and traditions in Europe are an asset, which enriches and reinforces the whole. The motto of the European Union is "United in Diversity". This is not for the moment the actual situation, but it describes the final end. This is the goal that we ought to approach gradually as our Union evolves and

deepens; as our Union strengthens through this process of joining forces; the process of unification.

Naturally, it is not evident that everyone will be willing or ready to follow at the same pace. Nevertheless, I believe that those who are able and willing, as is definitely the case with Greece, ought to lead the way for the Europe that we envision. Ultimately, the way forward will not be determined by the individual power and size of member states but by commitment and participation in the major European projects.

Our response to the challenge of the current financial crisis will not only test the effectiveness of our Union. It will also test our capacity to meet common fundamental values, pose common goals and act in coordination. The capacity to, once more, lay down, as our forerunners of the European edifice did before us, a definition of Europe that is at the same time modern and diachronic; capable to touch European citizens today connecting them to the historical past of our continent and pointing to the future.

The steps we are taking in response to the current financial crisis are also steps towards deepening; decisive steps towards a Europe that is more political, more social, more effective. A European Union of Citizens.