

CO-OPERATION FOR THE EXPANSION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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The Danube river plays a vital role in Central Europe, and affects the evolution of life and the environment. The Danube is really history. In the past, when it was difficult to cross the river, the Danube divided mutual cultural, trade and policy relations in Central and Eastern European nations. But now that conditions have improved, the river has become a link for these countries, and particularly for the ones that are now in transition towards democracy, a market economy and European Union membership.

Co-operation and mutual understanding among the Danube countries is the key element for the development of this area, a process which is ever continuous. This process involves scientists, engineers, politicians, diplomats, as well as artists and teachers. And today's conference is a clear example of this successful process. The Danube can really create a platform for common policy in trade, transportation, tourism and communications, but it is mainly the cultural dimension that is most important.

When the Berlin wall came down, the European Union recognised the significant problems that the associate countries of Central and Eastern Europe would face in overcoming the communist legacy of environmental destruction and pollution. This task we know will require the co-operation of all sectors and all professions of society, as well as wider and deeper co-operation among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe themselves. For it is only in a wider union state - perhaps the greatest challenge of the 21st century - that these problems can be successfully tackled.

An European Union intergovernmental conference is now under way and it will, hopefully, endow Europe with a new treaty with increased progress in the area of foreign policy - an European Union that will be closer to its citizens and have a flexible policy-making and decision-making mechanism, in order to allow expansion in the near future.

The European Union has, in the last several years, developed a policy for associate countries - the so called pre-accession policy - which is currently implemented in associate States in the form of the White Paper and the well known PHARE programme. In March 1997, the European Commission adopted new rules for the pre-accession strategy and the PHARE programme and these rules mainly focus on financing institution building, with the understanding that associate countries desperately need the harmonisation of public administration and the setting up of an important administrative and legal framework. This is of utmost importance for the deepening of democracy.

Ambassador **George Zavvos** has been the first European Commission Ambassador to Bratislava. He has been Member of the European Parliament in the European Peoples Party (EPP) Group, and Substitute Member of Budgets, Legal Affairs and Citizens Rights and Budgetary Control Committees. He has also been Member of the European Parliament Delegation for Relations with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Delegation for Relations with the US, as well as Member of the EPP Group for Central and Eastern Europe. He was elected Member of the Board and the Investment Committee of the European Parliament's Pension Fund and has served as Chairman of the Committee for the Reform of the Greek Financial System. Before his election to the European Parliament, he was an official at the Commission of the European Communities at the Directorate General for Financial Institutions and Company Law (DG XV), whose responsibilities included the preparation of 1992 EC Banking Strategy and the Second Banking Directive (March 1981-April 1990). He has lectured on EC Banking Policy at the Solvay Business School, Universite Libre de Bruxelles and, in 1988, he was a visiting scholar at the Harvard Law School. Ambassador Zavvos is an Attorney at Law, and has studied at Athens University Faculty of Law and at the College of Europe in Bruges. He is the author of The Banking Policy of the EC for 1992, and has published over 45 articles on EC banking, securities, pension funds and European geopolitical issues. He is presently with the European Commission in Brussels.