

Young Diplomats

2020-2021

Young Diplomats @ the British Embassy

An active learning project in cooperation
with the British Embassy

Department of International and European Studies



A Win-Win
Partnership

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Introduction

The Idea

Fourth year International Relations and European Studies students come to grips with the world of the real practitioners. The aim of this project is to familiarize our students with modern diplomatic practices, develop their critical and analytical skills, improve their ability to cooperate with each other and communicate their ideas in public. Our cooperation with the British Embassy will provide the springboard for this project and allow our students to learn about contemporary issues of the British Foreign Policy, enhance their knowledge of the British politics and policies as well as of the British Diplomatic Service.

We expect that the project will enhance our students skills in very important areas such as decision-making, situations assessment, creative thinking, public speaking, briefing preparation, interpersonal skills development, team building, all while preparing them to be informed professionals and active citizens. In addition, students will have the opportunity to engage with real practitioners and focus on actual priorities of the British Foreign Office.

This pilot project was initiated and supervised by Dr Revecca PEDI in cooperation with Mr Richard North and Dr Alexandros Nafpliotis from the British Embassy. This project has been developed as part of the course Modern Diplomacy, Economy and Business.

Introduction

The Process

According to this scenario, students are entrusted with the task to advise the British Ambassador on 4 British Priorities in the region.

Students will be divided into 4 working groups, consisting of 3-4 persons each. Each priority topic will be assigned to one group of students who will prepare a presentation for the class and debate their proposals in front of their fellow students, teaching staff and members of the Embassy's staff. Students will be briefed on the different priorities by Members of Staff of the British Embassy. Members of the staff of the British Embassy in cooperation with Dr Pedi will assess the progress of the project midway, see how initial ideas are evolving and respond to students' queries with regard to the project. After the presentations, the final deliverable of the project will be a brochure with students' recommendations.

Priority 1

Future UK-Europe
and UK-Greece
relations

Emphasis on practical initiatives and areas of priority collaboration, rather than e.g. ideological frameworks

Students- Authors

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BREXIT

Priority 1

Future UK- Europe and UK-Greece relations

BACKGROUND

Before the end of the transition period, the European Union and the United Kingdom signed a Trade and Cooperation Agreement, which provides a solid basis for future cooperation. The EU and the UK still share a lot of common interests that provide strong incentives for their alignment in some key areas. The same is the case for the individual Member States, such as Greece, which has strong bonds with the UK that will continue to connect them even after Brexit.



Priority 1

Future UK-Europe and UK-Greece relations

PESCO

Although the EU and the UK have concluded on the nature of a wide variety of sectors regarding their future relationship, there is not, until today, an agreement ruling defence issues, which accounts for no framework in place between the UK and the EU to coordinate joint responses to foreign policy challenges, while they face the same international challenges and threats.

As a result, the defense sector could provide room for some initiatives. Such an initiative could be the participation of the UK and British defence industries in some PESCO projects since the EU allows this option for third countries and companies if they meet several conditions. 38 out of the 46 PESCO projects are aligned with NATO priorities, the capabilities developed remain under national control, and they are capable of being deployed in other frameworks such as the UN and NATO. This setting makes PESCO an option worth considering, since the British government prefers more ad-hoc like solutions regarding defense, wants to maintain the command of its forces, and prefers NATO as the number one framework in this area.

Furthermore, since it is up to members of individual projects to consider inviting a third State to participate in a specific project, the defense section of the British Embassy could play a role in gaining the support of Greece to join in the five projects, in which Greece is the coordinator country. These are about intelligence, maritime surveillance, cyber threats, special operation command and control, and helicopter training, with the first three being perfectly aligned with the UK's priorities at the moment.

Priority 1

Future UK-Europe and UK-Greece relations

Cybersecurity

As long as the UK and the EU continue to cooperate in the field of information security, the latter in order to show its key role could offer the appropriate know-how and technology to the EU, not only to reduce cross-border cyber threats but also to protect the banking system from hacking and cyber-attacks. In this way, the UK will protect its citizens, but at the same time, it will also have economic benefits from its valuable expertise. On the other hand, the EU will benefit from the contribution of the UK to secure cooperation as it will be more protected and highly ready to confront potential digital enemies. The UK has both the capacity and the momentum to actively contribute to curtailing both European and non-EU enemies.

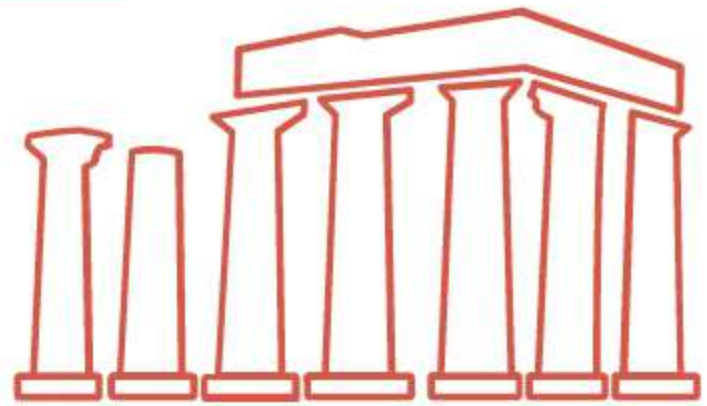
At the same time, cybersecurity can be an area of investment and provision of UK expertise to Greece in order to create closer relations between the two states. In this context, multi-spaces related to cyberspace and internet surfing could be created by British companies of technology, open to the general public, and any start-ups. In particular, such an initiative can take place in Thessaloniki, which aims to gradually become a technology hub through investments such as Pfizer's Innovation Centre and ThessIntec programme. Thus, Greece will be able to achieve its digitalization faster and will acquire defense mechanisms in the digital dimension while at the same time the UK will be able to harness the potential of Greek regions and capable human resources.



Priority 1

Future UK-Europe
and UK-Greece
relations

Education



Even after the UK leaves the EU, relations between the UK and Greece can continue in the field of Education. Firstly, based on the upcoming national Turing programme which aims to help British students study at the best universities around the world and not just in Europe there could be cooperation with Greek universities in the near future and not only. Specifically, there could be a two-way exchange of students between the two countries. As the Erasmus programme combines the exchange of university students but also an internship in a company or organization for senior students in the EU, Turing programme could also have an expansion including a sector for internships. In this way, there will be a similar "contribution" of British students in our country in similar terms with the contribution of Greek academics and students in the UK, which has been recognised by the British Embassy. Another suggestion, which could further strengthen this relationship is an internship through the Turing programme. Due to the fact that an EU citizen after Brexit has to fulfill certain requirements, the internship could work as a way of evaluation for senior students in case that along the way they would like to continue their work in the company or the organization of the internship. Furthermore in the programme could be included an exchange of merchant marine students. In this way, the UK-Greece relationship in the field of education and research that has proven to be very strong over the past 20 years could continue.

Priority 1

Future UK-Europe and UK-Greece relations

Trade diplomacy

Trade diplomacy supports the companies of the country of origin for economic success and the general goals of each country for national-economic development and promotion of trade. The contribution of shipping to trade diplomacy and ultimately to the support of the national economy is important. The cooperation in shipping between UK and Greece will help the economic development of both countries because of the influence of Greek shipowners (30% of global shipping companies are Greek-owned and have strong ties with Piraeus) and the UK flag that has provided protection and identity to all bearers across the seas. A recent law, 4504/2017, could help new British investments because it set a fresh way for investments by decreasing bureaucratic hurdles. For this purpose, we propose to set up logistics centers in large ports in the country, specifically into distribution parks, which will serve domestic export companies and foreign investors. This could happen by giving motives for both countries' investors. The UK and Greece should encourage active investors to cooperate in this sector. Given that the profit is increased despite the economic crisis, combined with tax incentives that both countries could agree on, there is almost a sure chance for a win-win situation.

Priority 1

Future UK-Europe and UK-Greece relations

Conclusion

As a result, this situation provides plenty of opportunities for Greece-UK cooperation. Both countries can benefit from each other's expertise and they can find a great partner in some policy areas. Thus, this long-standing bond may very well be still highly mutually beneficial.



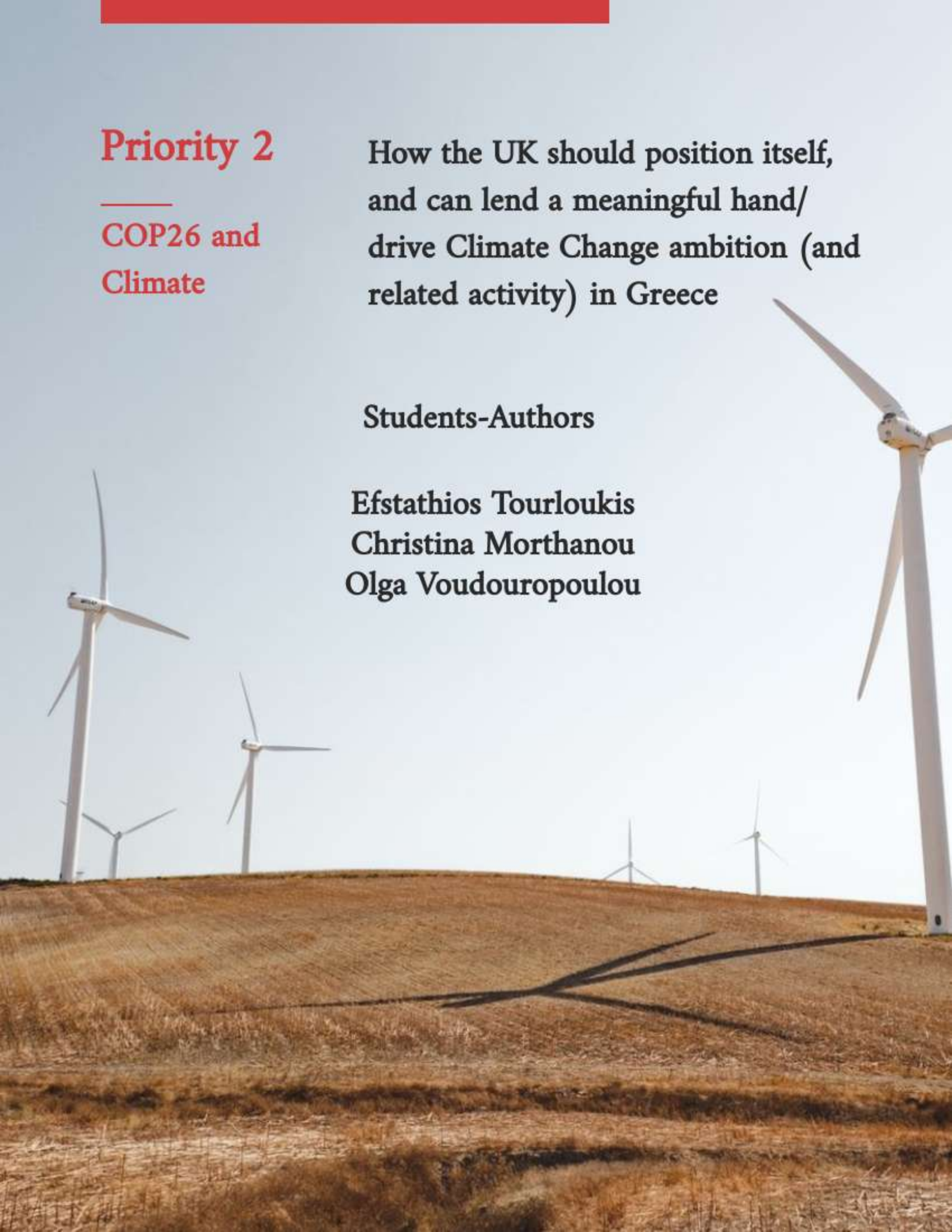
Priority 2

COP26 and Climate

How the UK should position itself,
and can lend a meaningful hand/
drive Climate Change ambition (and
related activity) in Greece

Students-Authors

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Priority 2

COP26 and Climate

Background

Climate change is a global challenge nowadays with a huge impact on the environment, climate and living systems of the entire planet. Greece as a Mediterranean country is among those regions that are highly affected by climate change.

However, with its Mediterranean climate and its natural capital in renewable energy sources, Greece has remarkable prospects of becoming a country that can lead the energy transformation and actively contribute to sustainable domestic and international development.

The United Kingdom as a country that promotes international environmental cooperation and has important bilateral trade and economic relations for many decades with Greece, can contribute to Greece's efforts to tackle climate change and place this issue as a top priority in the UK-Greece relations.



Priority 2

COP26 and
Climate

Wind energy powerhouse



There are many areas where the UK and Greece can partner together on the issue of climate change. First of all, the UK is a wind energy powerhouse.

It is one of the pioneer countries of wind farms and mostly wind farms at sea. Greece has a vast number of islands in the Aegean and the Ionian Sea. The vast majority of them aren't connected to the continental electricity grid. These islands are relying on polluting and expensive petrol generators for electricity.

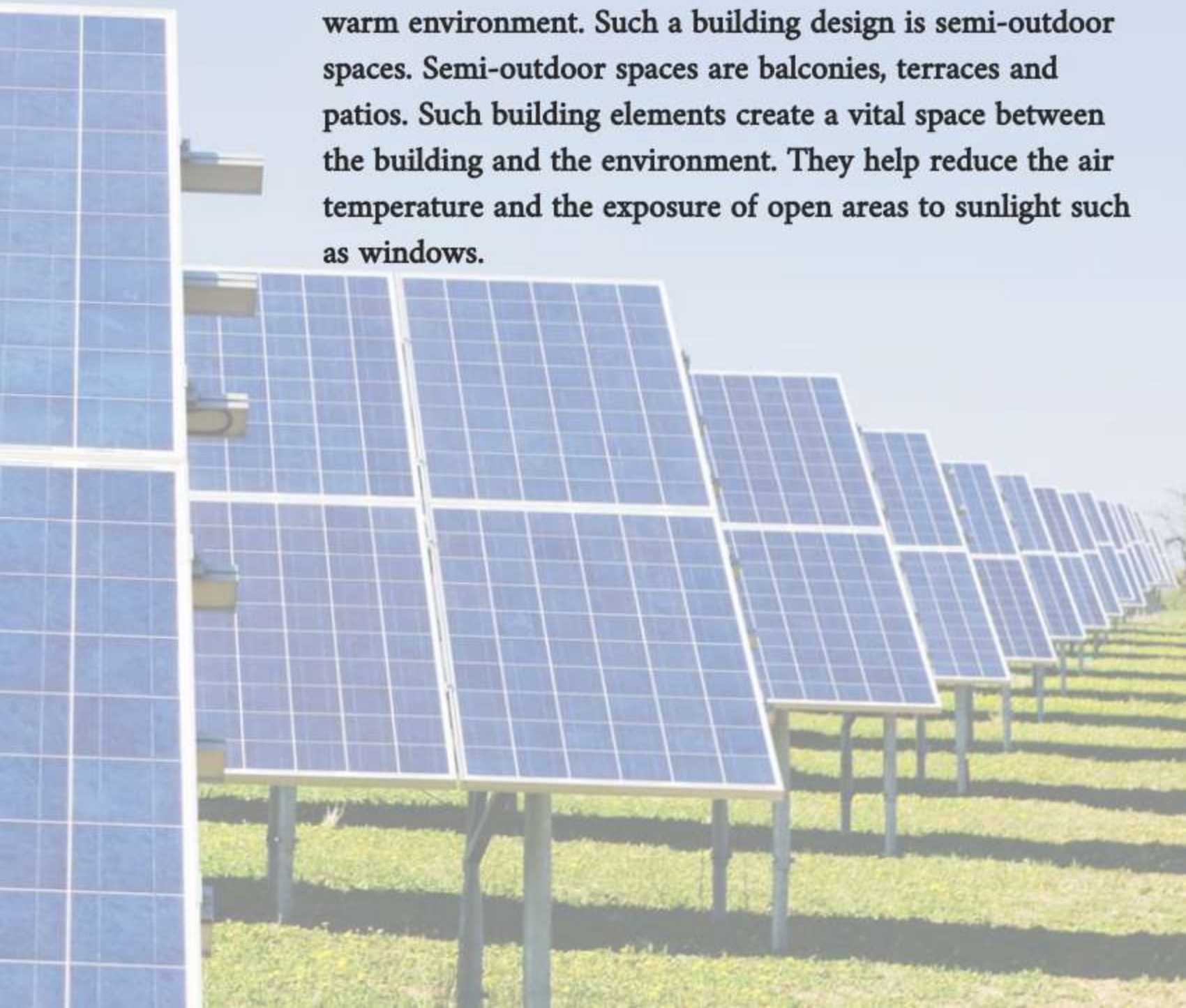
On top of that islands suffer many power outages in the summer due to the generators' high electricity demand and low reliability. As a result, Greece could greatly benefit from the UK expertise on wind energy. A UK-Greece partnership can be a win-win solution for both countries. Firstly, the UK and Greek universities can collaborate in various research areas in combating climate change. Such regions are offshore wind power, solar energy and smart grids. The collaboration between research centres is made easier by the UK staying in the Horizon Europe program. Secondly, the two countries can join forces and create a green energy fund, providing startups with funding for innovative energy projects.

Priority 2

Energy savings technology

COP26 and Climate

Another area where the two countries can work together is building energy saving technology. Reducing energy consumption in buildings is essential in achieving zero carbon emissions by 2050. Due to its hot climate, Greece has a long-standing tradition in energy-efficient design in a warm environment. Such a building design is semi-outdoor spaces. Semi-outdoor spaces are balconies, terraces and patios. Such building elements create a vital space between the building and the environment. They help reduce the air temperature and the exposure of open areas to sunlight such as windows.



Priority 2

COP26 and Climate

Transportation

Last but not least, transportation is one of the most contributing factors to climate change. Both countries have committed to decarbonizing their transport sectors by 2050. There is a lot of room for synergies in the aviation and shipping sectors. More specifically, the UK government and the EU have committed to implementing a sustainable aviation fuel mandate by 2025. The implementation of sustainable aviation is crucial for Greece's tourism industry. According to SETE, the UK is the second-largest origination country in terms of arrivals accounting to 12 per cent of the total tourist inflows in 2010-2019. Having such actively committed to reducing carbon emissions is essential for the prosperous future of tourism industry.

Last but not least, decarbonizing the shipping sector is going to be one of the biggest tasks of combating climate change. The UK and Greece have a long, prosperous relationship in the shipping industry. The Greek merchant fleet is the largest in the world, and its headquarters are located in London. The conditions are ideal for launching joint initiatives for reducing carbon emissions. Such is hydrogen-powered engines funded by the UK government ten-point climate plan and Biodiesel and the installation of scrubbers by the Greek Government.

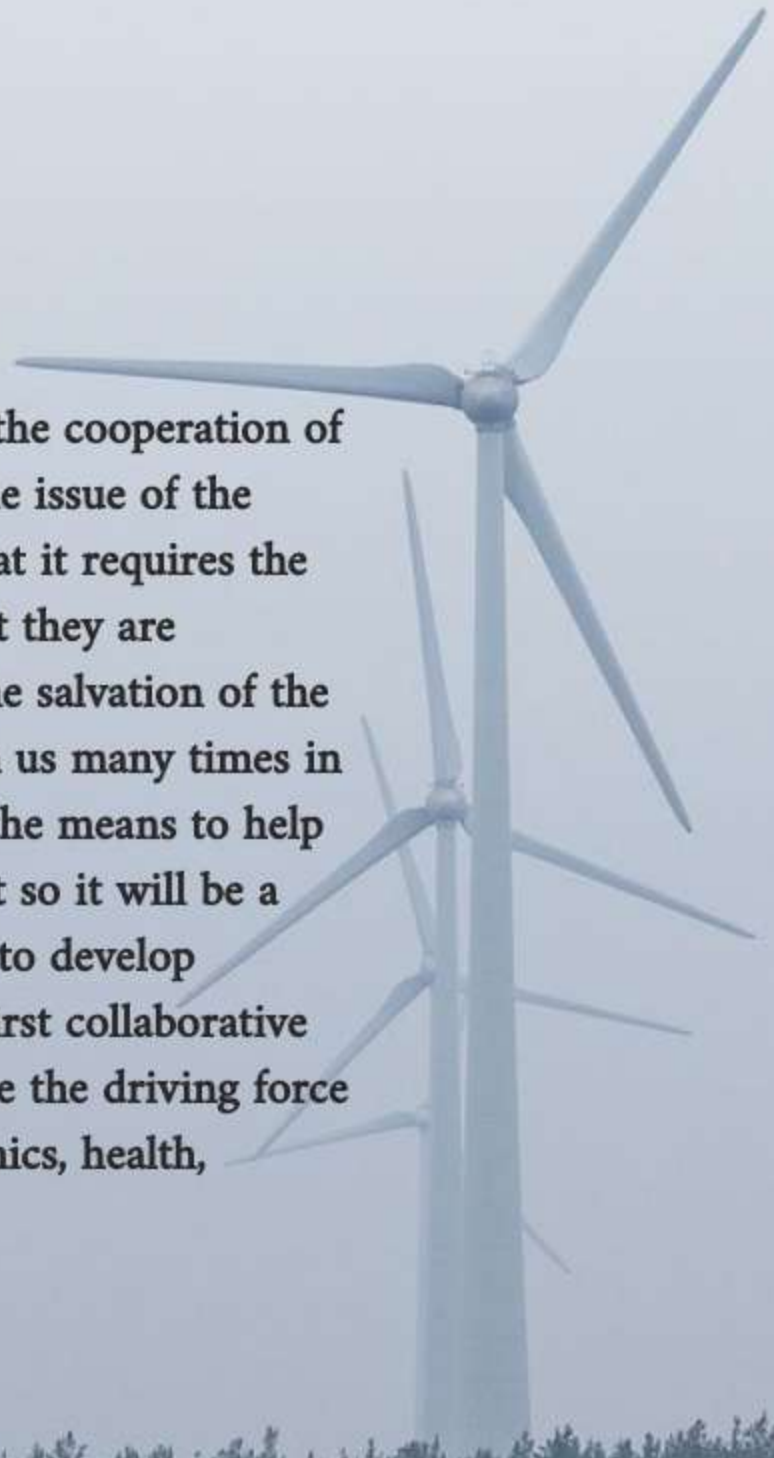


Priority 2

COP26 and Climate

Conclusion

It is necessary to recall how important the cooperation of the United Kingdom with Greece is. The issue of the environment is global and so critical that it requires the cooperation of all states, whether or not they are members of the European Union, for the salvation of the planet. The United Kingdom has shown us many times in the past that it has the know-how and the means to help a country like Greece to save our planet so it will be a very strong ally for Greece in its effort to develop ecological consciousness. Perhaps this first collaborative effort for ecological development will be the driving force behind future collaborations on economics, health, education and culture.





Priority 3

'Soft Power'

Including education, culture and sport: how can the UK best leverage the incredible wealth of links between itself and Greece for political relevance

Students-Authors

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Priority 3

'Soft Power'

Background

The two countries have closed two centuries of diplomatic cooperation from 1821, on the Greek independence struggles, up until today in 2021. So, as far as the pandemic crisis is mediated, we have entered a key year of soft power value for both allied nations. To decide on the areas of soft power on which we would like to focus, we conducted a survey on the preferences of our fellow students, friends and family. According to the participants' views, the most important areas are: Politics & Society, Education, Culture and Sports. In what follows we highlight the importance of these four sectors and we suggest that they provide ample room for the strengthening of the relations between Greece and the UK.



Priority 3

'Soft Power'



Sports



Politics & Society



Gastronomy



Arts

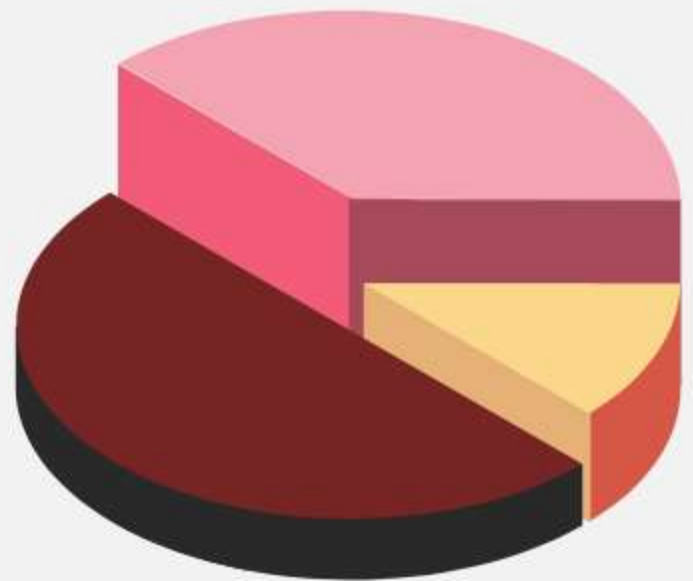


Culture



Education

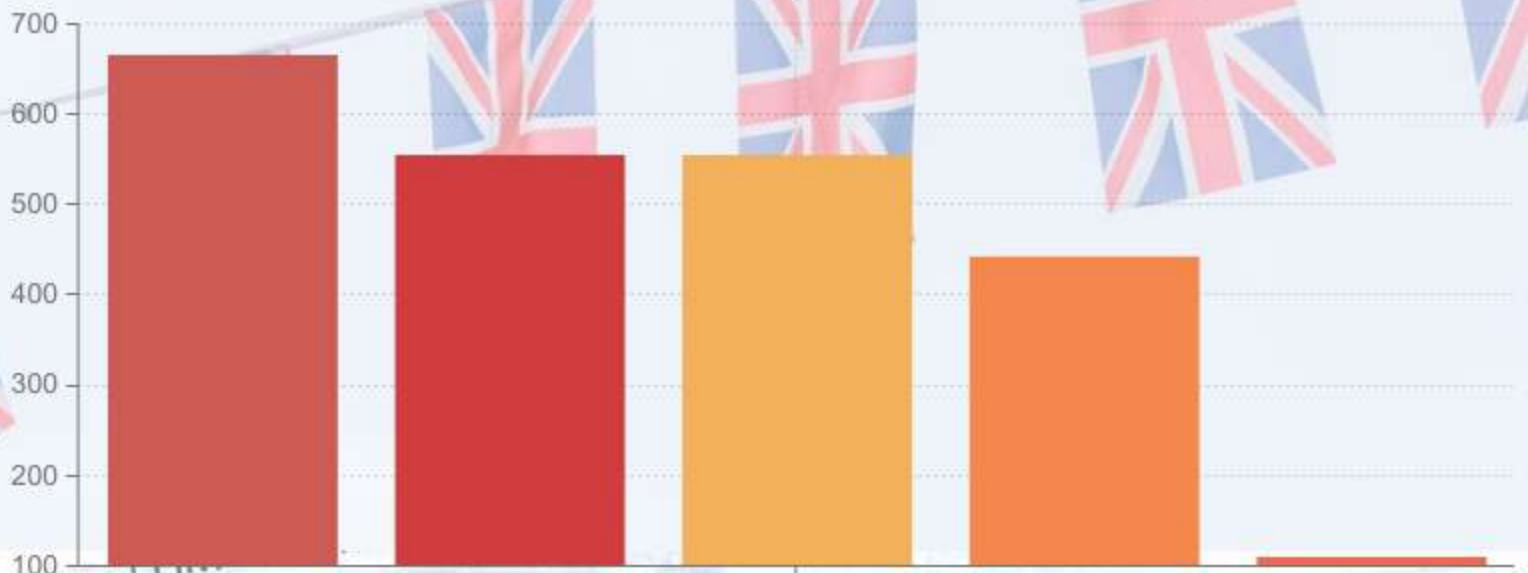
Which sector of the British Culture do you prefer the most ?



Priority 3

'Soft Power'

In which sectors of the british politics and society are you more interested in?



- Brexit
- British Party System
- British Royal Family
- Multiculturalism
- Relations with the USA

Get ready for Brexit

Priority 3

'Soft Power'

Society and politics

In regards to society and politics, two heavily interconnected sections of everyday life, it is crucial especially in a Greek environment to introduce some details and events that are going to influence the view of every mind and age group. The Greek side's understanding of the British politics is vague and due to Brexit is usually confusing. The sector of the society on the other hand, is a faction that can most certainly be enriched while being full of features for both sides to gain from. Some interesting proposals of sociopolitical weight are the following:

The first proposition considers the second largest Greek city, Thessaloniki, awarded the Youth Capital EU Milestone of 2014, in which a well recognized Thessaloniki International Fair is annually conducted. Its main goal is to promote technological, cultural and sociological elements of a specific selected country to the people of the city as well as the very many Balkan and international visitors, for instance the last fair was in honor of India back in 2019 while the event was cancelled in 2020 due to the unfortunate development of the pandemic. Our proposition consists of the proper British body (governmental or private) to contact HELEXPO, the body responsible for the settings of the T.I.F, developing the brand new fair in honor of Great Britain.



Priority 3

'Soft Power'

Society and Politics

This move would result in soft power gains throughout the Balkans for London, while also pinpointing the importance of Northern Greece to the British side, a geographical area usually overshadowed by either Athens or our beautiful Greek islands.

The second proposition is all about historical heritage. In 2009 the Museum of Acropolis opened as one of the most modern museums of its kind. Since then, Greece has the capacity to safeguard and preserve its valuable antiquities. In 2021, given the historical importance of this year to the Greek people, the circumstances are great for the return of the Marbles as a gesture of good will and trust between the two countries. Such a development will attract the interest of Greeks in Greece and abroad and shape a more than positive image of the UK. The UK can also support Greece through sharing know-how and technology for the preservation of Greek antiquities.

Priority 3

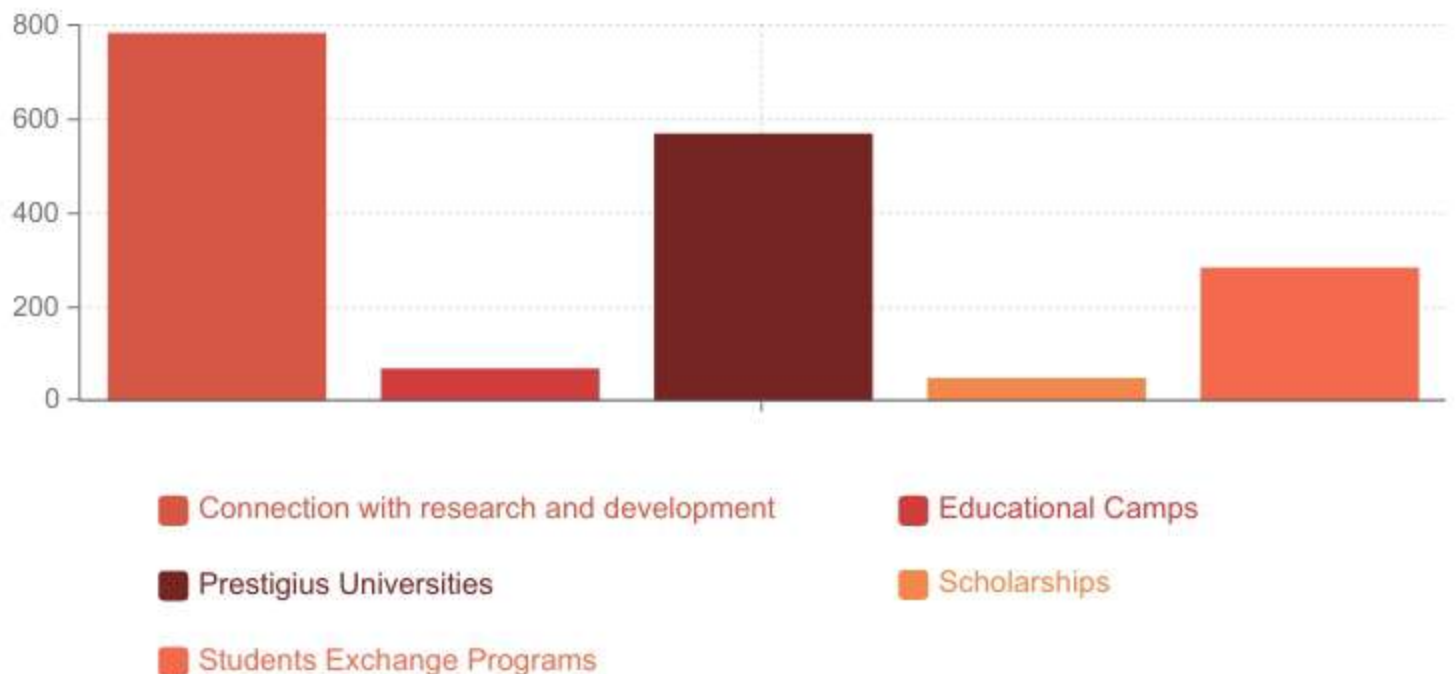
'Soft Power'

Education & Culture

Education has always been a force that influenced culture and scientific thought by spreading the ideas developed in universities throughout the world. Great Britain is the top choice on higher education for greek students, influencing both people and institutions. The acquaintance of the host country's achievements in science and culture will consequently lead to a successful transmission of the language and culture.

Culture is a source of values, identity and a sense of belonging. It also contributes to prosperity, cohesion in society and integration. Our propositions on the educational sector are the following:

For which sectors of the British Education System are you more interested in ?



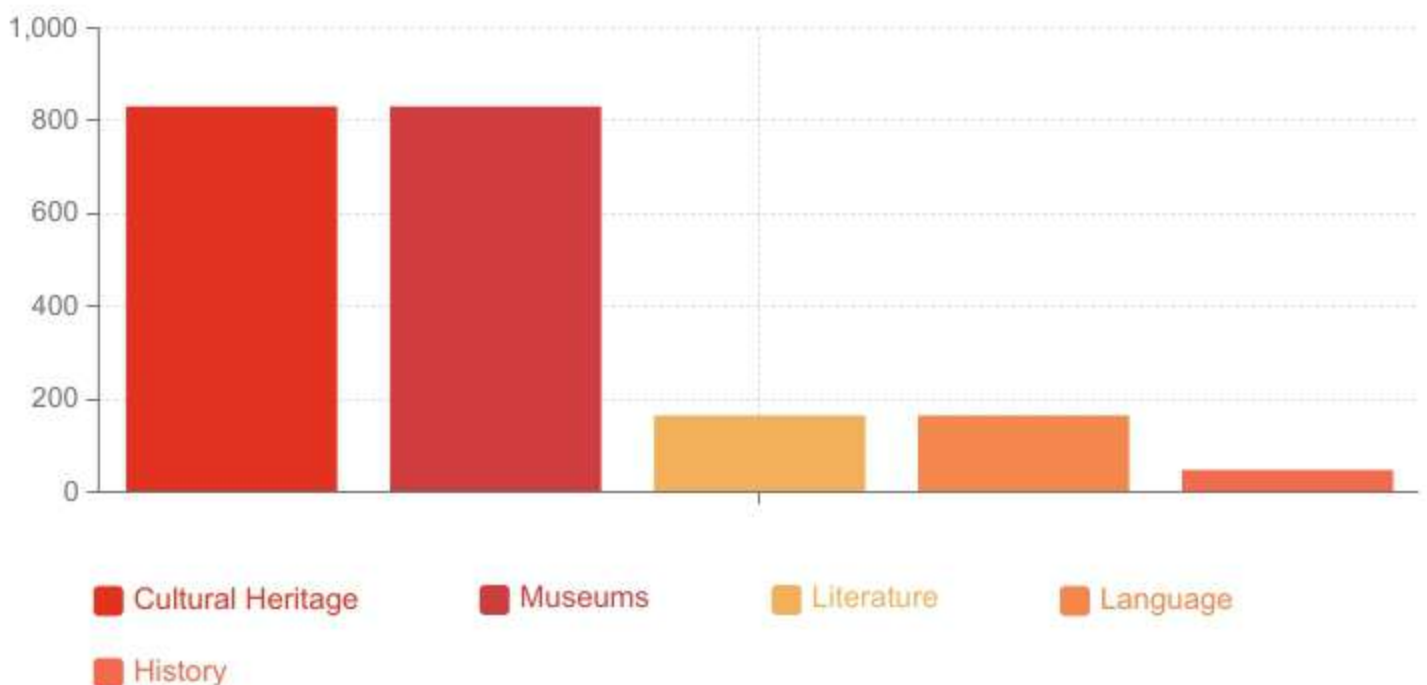
Priority 3

'Soft Power'

Education & Culture

The link between higher education and the market is of top interest to the younger generation in Greece according to our research. Our proposition is aligned with this very interest, endorsing the cooperation of universities and companies to achieve reliable connections with the international market. Great Britain is a country that expertise in this sector and can provide Greece with significant knowledge. Creation of innovation units from British companies connected with Greek universities and vice versa will supply a new kind of cooperation and exchange of expertise for both sides. Innovation units can be focused on Research and Development in Medical Science, Architecture, Information Technology, Environment etc. Higher education institutions and satellite universities will set the basis for closer cooperation.

In which sectors of the British Culture are you more interested?



Priority 3

Education & Culture

'Soft Power'

According to the cultural sector, there are some more propositions:

The areas of modern art as well as that of the ancient culture provide opportunities for cooperation and people to people diplomacy. Theatre, ancient and modern, photography, classical and contemporary arts, museum and cultural heritage management hold the potential to strengthen the ties between the art communities of the two countries. Common projects, residencies and cultural exchanges will increase the UK's soft power in Greece and vice versa.



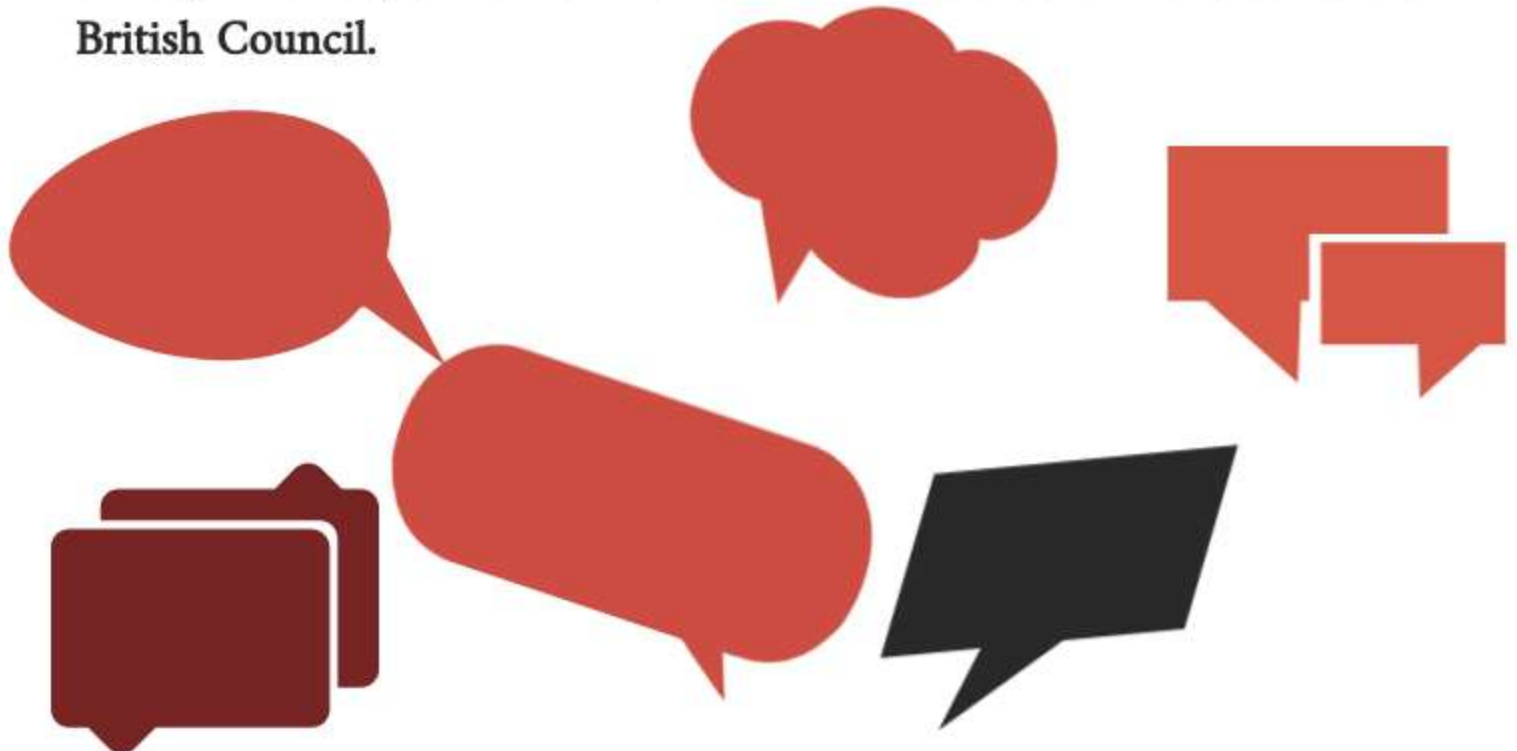
Priority 3

'Soft power'

Education & Culture

The British Council in Thessaloniki should aspire to a stronger engagement with the public, and especially with the youth through cultural events, competitions, etc. The year 2021 is a very significant one for Greek citizens. There is a timeless relationship between the two states due to the contribution of Britain from 1821 until today. The relation can be featured through history with the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the Greek Revolution. This can be implemented through events, conferences or even online tours and presentations in museums and historical monuments.

Language is a way of understanding the culture of a country. Summer Camps is a unique chance to bring young people close to each country and impart cultural goods and folkways. In Greece this can take place through the cooperation of the International School of Athens and the British Council.



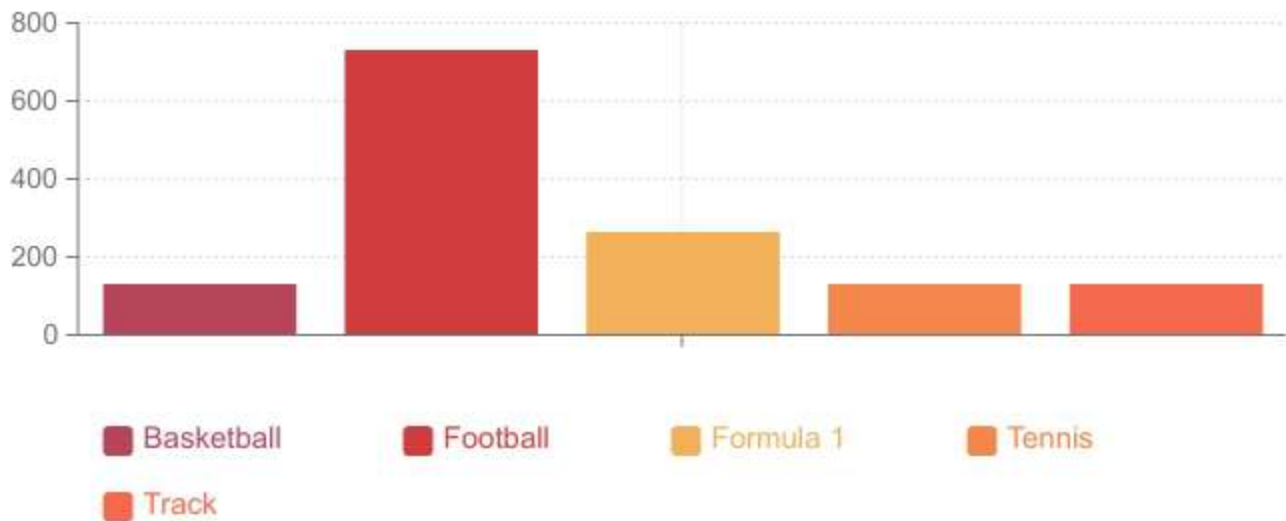
Priority 3

'Soft Power'

Sports

Sports are an integral part of Britain's "Soft Power". According to the survey, the British sports category took first place in the preferences of the Greek people.

Which sports, based on the British sports culture , do you prefer the most?



So our proposal for promoting the two countries' interests will be based on the sport of football. Football is an important and integral part of the daily life of the Greek and the British people alike. Our proposal is the following:

The Greek football reality is plagued on a daily basis by fan violence, while on the contrary we see Great Britain having achieved to eliminate this phenomenon, creating an environment worthy of admiration.

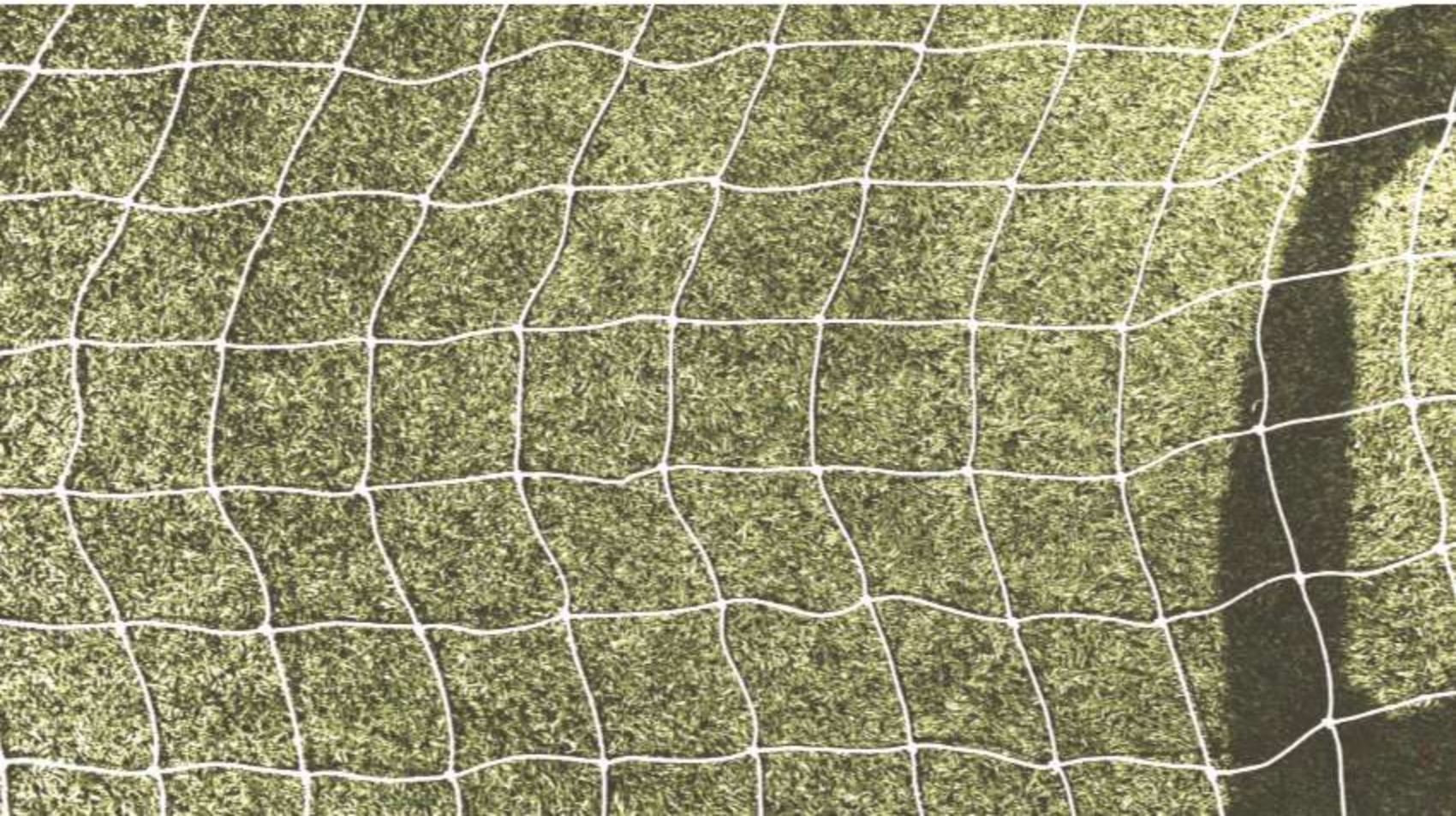


Priority 3

Sports

'Soft Power'

As far as the issue of football culture and sportsmanship is concerned, the Greek Ministry of Sports could cooperate with its British counterpart, in order to obtain useful information on the issue or perhaps to convert some laws that were implemented and attributed to the British case, aiming to eliminate the phenomenon of fan violence and hooliganism in Greek stadiums. The political gain for the Greek government that would solve the fan issue would be huge, while for the British side by offering an intangible zero cost, know-how, would be able to reheat relations with an EU state for the currently active post-Brexit era.



Priority 3

'Soft Power'

Conclusion

For the final notes, we may add that these types of bilateral moves are crucial for the balance of power in the Balkan region as long as it is conducted with respect for the countries involved. Great Britain and Greece can benefit from actions on Social and Educational matters while getting familiar with each other's culture and heritage. The cooperation of our ancestors shall be remembered and continued in the auspices of our modern era.

Priority 4

Western Balkans

How can the UK play a meaningful role here following our departure from the EU, bearing in mind EU accession is a key – but not the only – priority/aspiration for the WB nations.

Students- Authors

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Priority 4

Western Balkans

Background

Greece is a longstanding member of the EU, NATO and other EuroAtlantic institutions. Through the establishment of good neighbourly relations and respect for the basic principles of international law and order, is interested in promoting peace, stability and economic prosperity to the broader region. This has been proven in the past through HiPERB which was highly active in order to reconstruct specifically this region. As a result, know-how was gained, cultural connectivity was broadened and the qualitative characteristics which describe the area were identified. At the same time, the UK expresses a remarkable interest in the region and it is expected to foster its activities there, while recognising the key role of Greece in the wider area, to empower regional initiatives. Its strategy should be focused on the below pillars: a) counter terrorism and security, b) connectivity and economic boost, c) youth and education and lastly, d) cultural integration.

Priority 4

Western
Balkans

COUNTER TERRORISM & SECURITY

To begin with, regarding Counter Terrorism, a further engagement into an initiative which already exists, WBCTi, is proposed. . Slovenia seems to lead in the operational field, however it is funded and orientated by the EU, USAID and the UK through the Regional Cooperation Council. It is suggested to use Thessaloniki's location, as it already facilitates a NATO base, to accelerate the cross-border stabilization process, with a clear impact over the refugee crisis or illegal transitions of terror groups. As Thessaloniki's geographical proximity to the region outweighs a wider Britain's one, it could work as a pin-point of coordination for those powers which are actively operating in the Southern Flank of Western Balkan borders. This could also work positively, for these states, in order to create a regional hub of police/military capacity building, promoting cooperation as well as mutual intelligence transfer. It can be achieved through several governmental institutions which Thessaloniki already hosts, such as Higher Interdisciplinary School of War. This means that a further collaboration individually, through special Municipalities' programs, would enhance communication and mutual trust between regional stakeholders as well as Western prestige in the region.

Priority 4

Western
Balkans

CONNECTIVITY & ECONOMIC BOOST

The establishment of a Western Balkan Economic Forum, through Britain's and Greek cooperation, is proposed in order to lift both countries' investments while also empowering entrepreneurship. Greek investments were mobilised to WB especially through HiPERB program which was highly active up until the Greek Crisis of 2008. What is more, in the financial banking sector, Greek National Bank bought the Stopanska Banka AD-Skopje off and in 2006 the Nacionalna merged with Štedionica Banka AD in Serbia and renamed into Eurobank AD Beograd . Nonetheless, the majority of Greek investments were decreased due to the state's economic crisis. Such a forum could be an effective way to reshape opportunities for all countries which are involved.

Thessaloniki as a start-point would lead the conference involving all the participants with an annual different host , under the auspices of the British and Greek Embassies regionally. The main goal will be to promote a productive dialogue among distinguished experts, academic staff, local and international entrepreneurs as well as political leaders in order to give a prominence into the existing capabilities and to future innovative ones. For this reason, this initiative could comprise three main orientations of discussion: a) connectivity of infrastructure and transportation, b) greenfield investments and economic development, c) energy security and sources.

Priority 4

Western
Balkans

YOUTH & EDUCATION

Additionally, the British agenda should seriously focus on youth matters, such as unemployment and lack of education. Thus, it is crucial to develop cooperation programs between Western Balkans, Greece and the UK, as youth exchange programs where students from these countries could study either in British colleges in Greece or to be financially supported to receive education actually in the UK. This kind of programs provides not only academic training but also working skills that would diminish unemployment and in the long term would lead those communities to prosperity and progress. In the same context, the British embassy could organize seminars and training courses aiming to impart specialist knowledge to citizens who would like to get involved in fields such as agriculture and tourism. Conclusively, the crucial problem of unemployment could be eliminated, which by the way in June of 2020, the phenomenon's rate in the region rose by 50 %, and 139,000 jobs were lost. At the same time, British colleges will maintain their primacy as the number one choice for studies of the Balkan people.

Priority 4

CULTURAL INTEGRATION

Western Balkans

Lastly, a vital priority is to modernize the institutional traditions and the religion approach, with initiatives which would have a clear impact upon Western Balkans mentality. For this purpose, campaigns, athletic and cultural events would be an efficient method to give prominence to human rights such as equality between the two sexes, sexual orientation, disabled people treatment and others. Particularly, Thessaloniki as a leading example, hosts several events such as the LGBTQ+ one, musical events in the framework of International Exhibition of Thessaloniki, the International Marathon of Alexander the Great and others. In the same context, a Western Balkan bicycle marathon is proposed with Thessaloniki as the starting point, Zagreb as ending point. It is true that in Thessaloniki bicycles are an everyday habit, while also there are Greek cyclists who have experience in this kind of tours to support the initiative. By that way specific collaborations among state's Municipalities and institutions could be achieved, gradually transforming the region into a place where people are respecting each other while also extending the rule of law perception.



Priority 4

Western Balkans

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the four pillars upon which proposals were analyzed, are necessary and should concern the UK, especially in the post-Brexit period, in which Britain would act more flexible redefining its thesis upon international order. Considering that its goal is to subserve resilience in the region, it is of great importance for the UK to establish stronger relations with the WB. As time goes by, even more countries, such as China and Russia, implement their own strategies in the area to gain influence. The role that Greece can play in the UK's efforts can be more than important, as its geographical proximity provides the ability to look at the situation from the Balkans' perspective. As a neighboring country, Greece has to deal with these nations on a daily basis and has a unique knowledge of and interest in the region. In this way, the UK will boost its presence in the region and Greece will be the intercessor in this strategic partnership. On the other hand, the region's small states will concede that London frankly does wish to promote stability and progress, achieve connectivity, and rule of law by promoting democracy and accountability without depriving their cultural features and identity.

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Priority 1

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