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THE FOOD SECTOR IN GREECE AND ITS POSITION IN THE E.U. (2009-2017)

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The Greek domestic food industry plays a fundamental role in the Greek processing industry and the Greek economy in general. The food industry steadily is one of the most important sectors of the primary sector of the Greek economy, and one of the driving forces behind Greek processing; in fact, developments in it affect, to a significant extent, Greek production as a whole. The present paper examines the course and position of the food industry in the decade 2009-2017. The study of this particular decade presents particular interest, considering that it encompasses the period of economic crisis. Other findings and conclusions that will be drawn reveal the behaviour of the above sector, its potential and any weaknesses or opportunities.

The following main structural figures will be analysed in this paper: Number of businesses, turnover, gross added value and number of employees. Parallel to their presentation and analysis, the above figures will be compared to the respective figures of the European Union, which will reveal the position of the Greek Food sector in the European Union. Eurostat is the source of this data.

The analysis shows that, since 2017, the domestic food industry has been covering 26.4% of total businesses of the Greek processing sector, ranking first among the other processing sectors, followed by metal products (14.3%) and apparel (7.2%). At the same time, it is the biggest employer in Greek domestic processing, as it employs 33.6% of all employees, compared to 6.1% in the Metal products and 5.9% in the Apparel sector. The presence of the food sector is also fundamental in purely economic terms, as it ranks among the top processing sectors, its gross added value nearing 24.6%, and first in terms of turnover as well (almost 25.2%, followed by coke and distillation products with 24.8%).

Comparative analysis of the above four figures to the respective figures of ten years earlier (2009) reveal the effects, mainly of the economic crisis, on the food sector. To be more precise, the number of businesses decreased by 7.4%, while gross added value and turnover decreased by 17% and 9.7% respectively. However, at the same time, the number of people employed in the sector had risen by 25%. It is worth noting that the above decreases are attributed to the small businesses (up to 10 employees), which, besides,

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constitute the overwhelming majority of the sector. This suggests that the larger businesses of the sector were quite resistant, during the period of the economic crisis.

Then, comparative analysis to the respective sector in the European Union shows that there is no significant difference. The vital role of the sector of food processing and its contribution to the European economy is obvious. The food industry is one of the biggest segments of the processing sector in the European Union, steadily emerging as one of the top sectors compared to other important sectors of the European economy, such as the automotive industry, chemicals, industrial machinery and metal products.

An important part of this study focuses on the ranking of the sub-sectors of the food industry. The analysis shows the following:

- In added value, bread and flour products stand out, presenting the highest percentage in the related classification (21%), along with fruit and vegetables, and beverages (from 15%), while dairy products rank third (14%).
- As to the number of businesses in the sector, the highest share belongs to bread and flour products (60%), followed by oils and fats (11%), other nutrition products (7%) and dairy (5%).
- As regards turnover, bread and flour products have the greatest share (17%), followed by dairy products (16%), and fruit and vegetables (14%).
- As to the number of employees, bread and flour products rank first (46%) in this classification, with fruit and vegetables in second place (11%), followed by other nutrition products (10%).
- Finally, when it comes to labour productivity, fodder shows the highest performance (53.3 Euros per employee), followed by beverages (52.6 Euros per employee), dairy products (43.9 Euros per employee) and flour mill products (36.1 Euros per employee).

The data of sub-sector classification suggest that the Greek food sector consists mainly of traditional sectors, which, basically, do not contribute to an increase in production added value or to the much needed - for Greek economy - extroversion. This paper shows that there is room for further improvement in the competitiveness of the food sector. Improving Greek food sector competitiveness will stem from supporting its human resources and their qualifications, knowledge, experience and skills, as well as the nature and degree of their specialisation. Furthermore, more efficient coordination and wider cooperation between sector representatives can contribute towards improved effectiveness and efficiency in the efforts to promote Greek products, as well as towards appropriate choices of strategies and stability in the implementation of long-term strategic planning. Generation of added value and increased extroversion rely, to a great extent, on the promotion of Greek products through appropriate, well-planned channels, quality. differentiation, and support of the standard of Greek / Mediterranean cuisine. The sector is lagging far behind in terms of the above, this being mainly due to the implementation of isolated decisions-moves, which are not part of a wider, long-term plan.

Finally, the analysis of the figures examined shows that the Greek food industry - despite its structural weaknesses - is a dynamic, competitive and extrovert sector, with important investments and business activity, in Greece, the Balkans and all around Europe. The food industry has maintained, in all these years, even during the prolonged economic recession in Greece, its key role, having proven that it meets the conditions for remaining a basic engine of development. The key issues as regards the role of the Greek domestic food industry are related to extroversion, the Greek quality of the products, the Greek brand name and an organised promotion of Greek products.