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Summary:

Where there is crisis, there is an opportunity for change. But this requires reforms on a bigger scale, and the EU makes this much easier. Governments should play an active role in the economy and pacify employers and trade unions. It should also invest heavily in production and scientific research. Despite higher taxes, this can lead to greater equity and growth. Large companies also have a responsibility to their community – they can take care of small parks and leave a sign indicating that they are responsible. This is the advertisement of the future, both effective and beneficial to the community.

Essay:

“The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word 'crisis.' One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger - but recognize the opportunity.” These words, spoken by John F. Kennedy in his speech in Indianapolis in 1959, carry the wisdom of ages of history through periods of cholera and Black Death epidemics and two devastating world wars. But all these global catastrophes have made our civilization stronger, and have taught us something that the Chinese have known for many centuries. We, Bulgarians, have had more than an equal share of pain and suffering throughout history. Dating back to the unification of Bulgaria and East Roumelia in the end of the 19th century, our country has a saying: “Unification brings power.” If we listen to the lessons that our history books teach us, we should know that, in the food and energy crisis of today, we must act together and seize the opportunity to improve our social, economic, and environmental well-being.

Of course, coping with problems of this magnitude requires global efforts and determination. People must be willing to put aside their different culture, nationality, and religion and make decisions that will be beneficial to all, not only to themselves or their countries. A huge leap in the right direction was the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals by the United Nations General Assembly. In September 2000, almost 200 countries signed the millennium declaration, which outlines the eradication of poverty and the achievement of environmental sustainability as some of its primary objectives. The European Union is also a tool for implementing reforms on a bigger scale. The establishment of the European Central Bank and the Euro as a common currency makes it a lot easier to counter adverse economic fluctuations throughout the Euro zone.

But can a society achieve economic equity without sacrificing economic well-being? Most European countries follow an economic policy that aims to keep inflation low despite the adverse effect on unemployment. But what about all the people who are left without jobs? This question leads to a moral dilemma – whether to sacrifice the standard of living of, say, 5 percent of the population, so that the other 95 percent may enjoy lower prices, or target unemployment and let prices rise as a consequence. But there is also another aspect since greater equity can lead to a less efficient economy. It may seem that economic growth and equity are two mutually exclusive goals. But most of the Scandinavian countries have managed to accomplish both, and Finland offers a good example of how to do that. After World War II, many reforms were made in Finland to reduce social risk. The government played an active role in the economy and served as an

intermediary between employers and trade unions. Massive investments were made in the manufacturing sector. This policy requires higher taxes, but this is a small price to pay for greater economic growth and equity.

Environmental issues also are an area of conflict. The signing of the Kyoto protocol, which restricts the emission of greenhouse gas into the atmosphere, was the first step towards environmental awareness. But unfortunately it is a small step for mankind, and a giant leap still parts us from implementing serious measures for reducing pollution. Of course, keeping nature clean is a costly endeavor, and there are companies so short-sighted that they care only about today's profit. In the capitalistic world of today, such corporations have much freedom and power. But more freedom comes with greater responsibility. And although it may cost them dearly, power companies, both private and state-run, must invest in alternative, environmental friendly power sources such as solar batteries and wind turbines. Factories must install filters and reduce pollution by as much as possible. And, most of all, all countries should invest in scientific research; because this is an investment in our future that will provide us with the technology we need to preserve our biosphere.

Apart from our environment, our lives greatly depend on continued economic growth. An increase of GDP is primarily due to an increase in production. But what can we do to enhance production? First of all, technological knowledge is a main determinant of the efficiency of every industry. Therefore, investing in technological research is always a good policy. The level of production also depends on the expertise of the workers and

thus companies might like to dedicate certain capital in order to educate and train their employees. Another way to increase GDP is to increase the demand for certain goods or services through advertisement. But in the same time, companies might do something beneficial to the community – such instances can be seen in Bulgaria recently. Some companies take care of small parks, or reconstruct parts of larger places, and leave a small sign indicating that they are responsible. Unlike other forms of advertisement, this really makes a good impression. I am always pleased to walk through the little park just next to the parliament and see that it is really well-run. And there is a little banner saying that the park is managed by Actavis. I am also happy to sit on a brand new bench in the renovated area around the lake in the central park in Sofia and see that this area was reconstructed by M-tel. This is the type of responsibility that every corporation should have to its community, and taking this responsibility will certainly increase the popularity of these companies and promote their environmentally friendly policy.

Times of crisis are times of opportunity; a chance to change ourselves and the world around us. We must seize that opportunity together and promote the development of solar and wind energy, as well as other new nature friendly solutions to the energy crisis; we must try to achieve economic equity without sacrificing economic growth. And most of all, we must care for our environment, so that the future generations may also admire its beauty.