

6. Epilogue (or Epitaph?)

Ladies and Gentlemen, we live in uncertain times and I even hesitated whether to call my final comment «Epitaph», rather than «Epilogue»! However, I remain an optimist and we have seen that, in its short existence, the EEA has proved to be a beacon of stability. The enhanced European market is in good shape: it is transparent and has flourished, following a pragmatic and, at times, inventive «tension», which has ensured that its unique system of parallel legislating, in the form of «positive automaticity», has largely satisfied both sides.

Of course, the EU has – or, at least, had! – moved on: Maastricht, with its two further pillars; Amsterdam, involving more co-decision; Nice and its anticipation – albeit incomplete – of further enlargements. But whilst, now, the Constitutional Treaty may, for some, still be «alive», for others it is, at best, «on hold» or, indeed, completely in tatters! Is it, then, the moment for the EEA – or some sort of «EEA bis» – to come back into fashion, to serve as an «extended waiting room» for further enlargements? Indeed, could it serve, rather than as «a half-way house», or some sort of «privileged partnership», as a «safe haven»?

Entirely for myself, I wonder whether the salutary lesson we are all going through at the moment should not, rather, incite our leaders to query whether too much diversity in too many core areas – whether money, or security, or employment, or, indeed, our relations with other European states – should not give way to a rediscovery of what we already have: proposals – and I use the word deliberately – put forward with clarity and conviction by the Commission; a Parliament which genuinely represents the views of the electors; a Council which is eminently transparent in its decision-making. For myself, I would wish us again to take pride in what we are trying to achieve – and, indeed, in everything we have already achieved – so that, for any non-EU, European state, the EEA, or other relationship it has with the Union – and however successful it may be – would, nevertheless, give way, one day, to an application under Article 49, the negotiation of appropriate conditions and full membership in a revitalised Union.